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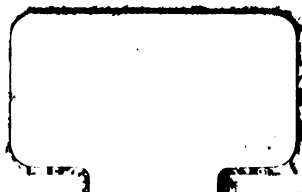
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JEANNETTE







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JEANNETTE.

VOL. III.

23H101
1877

JEANNETTE

BY

MARY C. ROWSELL

AUTHOR OF

"LOVE LOYAL," "ST. NICOLAS' EVE,"
&c., &c.

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more."

RICHARD LOVELACE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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JEANNETTE.

CHAPTER 1.

CONCERNING BRIDESMAIDS.

NEXT day I showed Isoline's letter to Sir Morton.

"What shall you say to her?" he asked, as he gently re-folded it, and returned it to me—"about the bride-maiding, I mean."

"She must come, if she wishes."

"And clearly she does."

"Unless, of course, you——"

"Unless I what?" he said, quickly.

"Unless you have any—any objection."

"My dear girl, if I had a thousand, what claim should I have to put them forward? Isoliné and you must please yourselves. It is altogether a woman's province, her bridesmaids, one of her last acts of independent authority. If I dared vote in the matter at all, it would simply be against having more than a dozen of them. It isn't because I'm stingy, and begrudge them their lockets or bracelets, or whatever the proper black-mail is, but they're an institution I'm ungallant enough not to care much for—personally, don't you know."

"You can't dislike it as much as I do," laughed I. "If it were not for the necessity of maintaining your dignity, I wouldn't have any at all; but 'noblesse oblige,' I suppose."

"Don't worry yourself on that score. My nobility will give enough satisfaction, I

hope, in a good dinner to the tenants, and a ball, and a holiday for the young fry, and as many evergreen arches as the place likes to break out into. It's fond of that sort of thing, I fancy, and one wouldn't deserve to hold the relations one does towards the people here if one could not feel grateful for their generous intentions. But I do maintain, Jeannette, that you and I have a right to marry ourselves as we like best, and, if we choose to be made into man and wife without any fuss and flutter, our souls are our own so far. Yes?"

I acquiesced with a grateful smile.

"We don't want a trio of bishops and half a dozen Queen's chaplains to help the vicar and Swithin Glastonbury——"

"Swithin Glastonbury?" I interrupted.

"Well, yes. It's one too many perhaps; but one can't put Cleresteer aside."

"Of course not."

"And yet it would be a pleasure to Glastonbury."

"Oh! I don't—know," stammered I.

"But I do, Jeannette. He likes you exceedingly, let me tell you, and I have an immense respect for him; and, at all events, I should like it."

"I'm sure I don't know what Lady Havering will say to it," I said, rushing at the first wretched subterfuge which suggested itself, and then standing dumb with shame at it, beneath the dark, astonished eyes transfixing me. "She won't countenance the proceedings," I blundered on. "I am sure if——"

"Lady Havering is free to please herself in the matter," he said, coldly. "I have done my part in leaving Havering Court at her disposal until we return, and you, I know, will invite the—the——"

"Pleasure of her company."

“Exactly, on our wedding-day, and Ursula will be a host in herself for the bridesmaid department; and, so much being settled, why should not the day itself be fixed? The summer is passing away, Jeannette, and there will be no long day-lights left for those sketchings we were talking about.”

And so plans took definite shape, and one day of the last week in August was finally fixed for our marriage. I had no plausible excuse for not yielding to his wishes. Yet how short the time seemed since we had stood beside the great stone in St. Grimwold's wood, and pledged our troth!

“Well,” as Althea said, “and so much the better. ‘Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing.’ And if it's really the case that you're to be Morton's wife before grouse shooting sets in,—poor things!—

there's no time to be sitting up in the clouds any longer, Jeannette. We must be practical," she went on, in brisk tones, "and, if I were you, I should decide on that lovely silver-grey matelassé, for going away in, Milligan showed us the last time. It's the sweetest shade I ever saw, and the bonnet and ostrich feather to match. The coal-scuttle shape bonnet—that was the newest, the young person said. New old, I suppose she meant," laughed Althea. "It's just the very double of the one my grandmother wore when she was married. I have a little sketch of her and my grandfather, that Richard Cosway—he was one of the guests—made on a scrap of paper at the breakfast-table. What a pity Morton can't wear those delightful satin pantaloons, and a long laced, flap-skirted coat, to match you! But men, poor dears! do cling as ridiculously tight to their chimney-pot hats, and

—the rest of it, as if they were the acme of grace and becomingness, don't they? I wonder what they'd say to us, you know, if we persisted in going on year after year making such monotonous sights of ourselves? And about the bridesmaids, Jeannette. That ought to be seen to at once. Your young friends won't thank you for a short notice. If I were a young maid now, instead of an old one, how delighted I should be to make one of the charming 'bevy!' That's the newspaper word, isn't it? But indeed you must not shilly-shally. Whom are you going to ask?"

"Ursula Havering."

"Her, of course—a nice little piece of attention to Lady Havering. And who else?"

"Why, Lina has volunteered, you know, if she can get her leave of absence."

"And very sensible of her," nodded Althea; "and besides these two?"

"No one."

"No one?—nonsense!"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"But, my dear," remonstrated Althea, "a couple of bridesmaids, either or both of whom might fail you."

"Then I should be married without. It wouldn't influence the validity of the ceremony."

"Well, I don't know," said Althea, with a dubious knitting of her brows. "No one would visit you after."

"I should be content to risk that hideous possibility," shrugged I.

"I like originality, but I must say, Jeanette, that I don't see why you should defy conventionality to such an extent. I cannot think Morton will approve," she added, mournfully.

"He does indeed."

"Then chacun à son goût," said she, with

a shrug in her turn. "I can only hope you and he will always be such echoes of each other's—fads, for it is a fad, and not at all the way I like to see young people enter into matrimony, especially a person of Morton's position in the county; and it will be frightfully dismal, child;" and tears were in Althea's voice.

"Not if you and Sir James condescend to countenance the ceremony, dear. Your faces are worth ten dolls in cardinal and old gold, and ten more in blue and cream."

"As bad as a funeral," persisted she, with a watery smile.

"No, no. Listen, now—think, Althea," I urged, gravely. "We shall be snug and cheerful enough, I hope. But look back; you know all, almost as well as I do."

"Certainly I do, quite as well."

"Then think of it, dear, all of it you know, and, when you do, you'll say I'm right."

"I do nothing of the kind," she maintained, stoutly. "Of course, I'm not dull, and I know what you mean, and I simply see that your sister wrecked her own happiness."

"But——"

"And that's no reason why you—but free will's a heritage, of course, and if you and Morton choose to be married under the rose——"

"No, no!"

"Under the rose, with only an old woman like me——"

"And Sir James."

"Well, well!——"

"And your friend, Mr. Glastonbury."

"Ah! what a queer, queer world it is!" and then Miss Cleveland relapsed into a brown study; from which, however, I speedily roused her, to discuss the respective merits of a box of dove-colour and grey

kid gloves, just sent over for selection from Milligan's. "There certainly is one great consolation, Jeannette," she said, cheerfully, "your whims and oddities about a quiet wedding don't extend to any narrow notions about your trousseau, and I like your taste, and the stitching of these gloves is perfect."

CHAPTER II.

HOME AGAIN.

LIKE doomed captives on their way to death, glad at every little temporary hindrance which bars the tumbril's course, I seem to be lingering over the trifling incidents preceding that time so momentous to me, and beside which all else that happens in my life must pale to insignificance,—that time now striding on apace.

Isoline carried her point with the Gräfin von Puppendorf, and, obtaining her four weeks' holiday, heralded her coming home through the post; but winds and waves are

capricious, and, for fear of disappointment to either of us, she elected to leave the day of her arrival uncertain, only assuring me that she would be "in time enough and to spare." And so she was, for, on the evening of the Monday before the Thursday fixed for our wedding-day, a sudden burst of hysteric barks and shrieks, threatening to crack Scamp's loving heart, proclaimed who was near; and next minute Isoline, with the transported, quivering, wriggling little creature in her arms, stood before us—the three of us, for Morton was there.

It was a strange meeting. Strange through its utter absence of sensational element. Had we three parted under the most ordinary conditions a few weeks before, our greetings now could hardly have been more tranquil and common-place. It is true that for an instant we two clung to each other with arms that trembled for love

and joy, but then we remembered we were not alone, and Lina must have been all too conscious, as I was, of the tall figure which had risen in startled haste. Gently disengaging herself from me, she turned and stretched her hand towards him. He took it silently.

"How do you do, Sir Morton?" she said; but he, far less self-possessed, vacuously echoed her words, and then slowly the life-blood flowed back into the two calm, stone-pale faces, while a deep, pent-up breath escaped me, as I took her cold hand from Morton's, and placed it in Althea Cleveland's.

"I am glad to see you, my dear," she said, kindly but rather coldly; and then, as Isoline took her place once more in the old home, Miss Cleveland's soft, clear eyes keenly summed up my beautiful sister's points. If the smile that relaxed her lips was to be

trusted, her conclusions were kind, and so we drifted into the interesting common-places attending a traveller's return, for Althea's presence, as sparkling snow hides yawning crevasses, smoothed over this meeting I had at once yearned for and dreaded. Even when Morton had gone, and Miss Cleveland retired to her room, little was said between us. Least of all upon what must have been uppermost in Isoline's heart, as it was in mine; but in her manner was none of the embarrassment fettering every syllable I strove to utter. When I went with her to her room, and while she took off her travelling-dress and shook down her beautiful hair till it concealed her face, she alluded with frank composure to the arrangements for Thursday.

"And when you are gone, Netta, how Scamp and I mean to enjoy ourselves!" she said, beginning vigorously to brush the shining threads.

"Isoline!" I burst forth, "what an incomprehensible girl you are!"

"Why am I?" she demanded, laying down her brush, and tossing the hair back from her face, turned it inquiringly on me.

"Dear, heaven knows how glad I am to have you, but—but——"

She laughed quietly.

"But how could I come—that's what you want to say, isn't it? How I could come, and deliberately see my old love married to another—that's the truth, isn't it, Jeannette?" she hurried on, with a hard little laugh, stripped of all its round-about.

"Well, because you and I, dear, are too lonely in the world to be able to afford to have hundreds of miles between us on such a day of days. That would have killed me quite. No, I could not have borne that—and why should I have tried? for what? a foolish mistake. Why, Netta, don't I know

that, if things had been what they seemed at first, you would not have left me to look after myself at such a time as this, though it had broken your heart to—to——” Her voice faltered, and she hurriedly tossed the hair back over her face, so that it completely concealed it, and her voice came husky and muffled through the golden veil.

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“Why do you force me to look back at those foolish bygones? The best people don’t like to contemplate their old blunders, and for me—there, Netta, don’t make my holiday dismal for me,—I’ve come home to be so cheerful and—and happy. I like just to remember only that I am back in the dear little old room again, and that Scamp barking after the cat will wake me up to-morrow morning, instead of Sophie Wilhelmine squeaking like a little pig while Lischen crimps her hair with the tongs. You don’t know,” she went on, with a deep

breath of unmistakeable content, "how delightful it is to be a lady at large again."

"You shall never go back to that horrid place."

"Not go back!"

"Certainly not. Why should you?"

"Because I've bound myself for three years."

"You can be bought off, I suppose?"

"By whom, pray?"

"By me."

"Ah! I see. And what is your fortune, my pretty maid, to do it with?"

"By Sir Morton, then. It is the same thing."

"To you, no doubt," she hurriedly interrupted, "not to me. A nice thing to begin your married life by incurring a debt for buying me off my slav—my promise. And when I so enjoy fulfilling it, too."

"Do you, Lina?" I asked, scanning the

sadly-changed face, with its darkly encircled eyes, where, only so fitfully, the old light gleamed, and the cheeks were so cruelly thin and wan, for all the flush of excitement burning in them now. "To be frank with you, Germany has not improved your personal appearance. You don't look well, Lina."

"I wonder whether you would," she retorted, with a light, vexed laugh, "if you'd slept dog's sleep in your clothes for two nights upon a shelf about as wide as a coffin, and been—it's no use pretending I haven't—frightfully sea-sick. Reserve your criticisms till the morning, my dear, and see what a sleep in that"—and she pointed to the billowy bed, with its rosebud chintzes—"will do for me! 'I have been there' (it isn't profane—only Dr. Watts—is it?), 'and still may go. 'Tis like a little heaven——' Oh dear! oh dear!" she went on, with a yawn of portentous magnitude,

“‘I am that tired,’ as Dolly always says. How well she does look, by-the-by, Jeannette, and so does Reuben. They’re going to be translated up to the great house, of course, and——”

“I’ll tell you all about that to-morrow. Good-night now, darling.”

“Well, good night, then,” she said, assentingly. “How tremendously handsome you’ve grown, Netta! You see I bear you no malice for your uncomplimentary personalities, and return good for evil. Handsomer than ever. That’s because you are so happy, so very happy? Yes? Good night, then. Schlaf’ wohl.”

Excellent advice! Yet how was she obeying her own counsel? Was it my fancy, or did my ear, when, an hour later, I went to bed, catch faint, low sounds, like stifled, bitter sobbings, from my sister’s room?

"Lina," I gently whispered, noiselessly opening the door, "are you asleep?"

No answer but the long, deep-drawn breathings of a calmly-resting sleeper.

"If I were a thief in the dark," thought I, as I crept away on tiptoe, "I couldn't be more fanciful."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE HAUNTED WOOD.

CERTAINLY in the morning I found myself forced to concede that a quiet night's rest had worked a change for the better in Isoline's appearance. With the exception of a slight heaviness about the eyes, and a certain languor, superinduced, no doubt, by the fatigues of her journey, and all the excitement of last night's coming home—for assuredly such lassitude was not natural to her—she looked like the old Lina again, and, as she sat there among her breakfast cups, it was hard to realise she had been months and months away.

"What nonsense," she said, with a restless laugh, when I proposed a day's *dolce far niente*, "to talk of being idle, when there are oceans of things to be seen about! Here is Monday morning, and Thursday your ladyship must please remember——"

"You should never make jokes of that kind, my dear," said Althea, solemnly.

"Jokes!" stared poor Lina.

"'There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip,' and Jeannette will not be a ladyship till——"

"Oh! I see," meekly assented Lina.

"They are not lucky, my dear, jests of the kind."

"Talking of lucky and unlucky, where's that handkerchief?—you know the one I mean, Netta," went on Lina, with a glance of significance at me. "Will you wear it if I—if I just put that little letter in? That's all it wants, you know. It wouldn't be

unlucky, would it, Miss Cleveland?" she gravely inquired; and then, in a few simple words, Isoline told the little story of her bridal handkerchief. "It's just to put Jeannette where Isoline was, that's all; it's as easy as——"

"Lying," I muttered under my breath.

"A hateful simile, though it is Hamlet's," said our oracle. "No, I don't feel qualified," she went on, after a pause, "to give an opinion on the point. At least, Isoline, your intention is excellent. It is very kindly meant of you, my dear."

Thus Althea's gentle heart, but I saw she was ill at ease.

"Then I'll finish it to-night," said Lina, "when we come back from Milligan's. And now tell me, Netta, what is Miss Havering's dress going to be?"

"Haven't a notion," laughed I, rather shame-facedly.

"Oh ! Netta, but mine ought to match, you know," she said, in dismay.

"Variety's charming, even in bridesmaids. We'll just buy what is prettiest in all Milligan's shop," and with that high end in view, the three of us started for St. Grimwold's.

But we found ourselves puzzled as Paris in our choice. Suffrages were divided between some soft azure gossamer stuff, and just such a fair white India muslin as had composed the dress I had worn at the Havering Court dinner-party ; and, if only for association's sake, I should have awarded it the golden apple, but I ran a near chance of being overruled in favour of the colour ; had I not won the day by an appalling suggestion that, as likely as not, yellow or red might turn out to be the hue of the festive garment which, Mr. Milligan a little stiffly informed us, was, he believed, being

ordered "straight from London" for Miss Havering.

"And then think of the effect, Lina!" I said; "but you're safe with white, happen what may."

And so the debate ended, and the dress, in all its completeness, was promised home by four o'clock next day, with solemn asseverations that Mrs. Tugnut's cap, which by some unaccountable oversight had not been put in hand, should be forwarded at the same time.

"It's rather a near shave all of it, isn't it?" asked Sir Morton, with the suspicion of a yawn, when Althea had detailed to him, with unnecessary circumstantiality, or so it seemed to me, what we had been doing with ourselves all day. Certainly he brought the infliction on his own head by originating the question.

"Milligan has promised," said Lina, lofti-

ly, "and his word is always his bond."

"If all the world were like this Milligan!" ejaculated Morton, stepping abruptly out into the garden.

"I fancy," said Althea, looking after him, "that he's getting tired of Milligan's name. Men always do expect women to look nice by magic."

On my dressing-table that night lay the embroidered handkerchief. I took it up with a sigh, as I might have handled a relic of the dead. Not for the universe would I have refused to make it a part of my bridal toilette, and yet what would I not have given to have been able to do so without wounding Isoline! There it lay, neatly folded, the "J" daintily stitched in, in such wise as almost entirely to cover the old lacerating needle-marks, an exception to prove the ruling against a fiancée's future name being marked upon her belongings

until that name has become hers beyond all possibility of dispute.

“And every rule does have its exception, they say,” mused I, with a smile at my own superstitious shrinking from the beautiful scrap of lace. What unworthy nonsense to be intruding into my thoughts! And how a man—Morton, for instance—would laugh at such arrant foolishness. What a picture of amusement at my expense his face would be! He would never again credit me with the possession of one square inch of common sense; and so, banishing my fancies to the limbo they deserved, I lightly laid the handkerchief away on my other wedding finery, like a gossamer sail amid shimmering satin billows, and slept soundly, for I was tired out with all the bustle and fuss which seem inevitable upon even these modest wedding preparations.

Perhaps it is as well that the eve of great

crises in our existence do not allow much time for thought ; and soon after daylight I had to be up again, and stirring about the thousand and one trifles that, with all one's foresight, will crop up hydra-headed fashion at the eleventh hour.

Punctual to the instant, and to our inexpressible relief and satisfaction, Isoline's dress arrived by the little omnibus—but, alas ! on search being made into the enormous basket in which it had travelled, not the ghost of Mrs. Tugnut's cap was to be found. So much vain waste of precious moments it was to flout frantically among the waves of tissue-paper. It was not there, that chef d'œuvre which Milligan's head young person of the millinery department had pledged herself to build up on the lines of Dolly's own special conception of the beautiful and becoming. A structure, it was to have been, of profuse ornamentation in the way of

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white satin bows and streamers, but—it had not come! The horror of the situation was inconceivable.

“It’s sinful shameful of Milligan’s, that it is!” cried Dolly, the tears stinging her eyes, “and me up to the ears in lemon sponge! Whatever shall I do? And it isn’t even as if my gownd had got the braid and buttons on yet, and not half hands enough about the place a’ready, let alone flying off to St. Grimwold’s. I’ll warrant they haven’t treated Mrs. Sharples in no such fashion. She wouldn’t have stood it nohow.”

“Couldn’t Reuben go for it?” suggested Lina.

“Reuben can’t be spared; and if he could, Miss Isoline,” said his wife, with dignity, “I wouldn’t trust him. No, nor ten Reubens within a mile of it, mauling of it about till it wouldn’t be fit so much as to put on Scamp’s head there.”

“Shall I go for you, Dolly?” asked I.

“You, dear heart! What next? And you a bride come Thursday morn!” she moaned, with hands and eyes uprising at the bare notion as she departed back to her saucepans; and still when, hat and gloves in hand, and my light grey dust-wrap over my arm for the cool of the evening, I entered the kitchen, the despairing query was breaking dolorously forth, “Whatever shall I do? Whatever——”

“Look now, Dolly,” I said. “Don’t you worry yourself. I am going for your cap.”

She turned on me, egg-whisk and basin in hand.

“You say I’m of no use here——”

“Because there’s nothing more to do, Miss Netta dear.”

“And I can’t sit twiddling my thumbs; and I shall be so glad of the walk. My

head aches—and it would do me good, really.”

“But it isn’t in no ways proper,” she said, with some faint signs of being won over. “What’ll the folks say, seeing of you trapesing about the country, and you Sir Morton’s lady before another——”

“But I shan’t trapeze about. I’m just going straight to Milligan’s, and can be back again——”

“Morton is coming at eight,” reminded Lina.

“It’s only an hour’s walk to St. Grimwold’s, and the same back. Good-bye.”

Not a little glad to be free of the bustle turning the dear little old house out of windows, and with some blissful comparison between this afternoon and that one which was so near at hand—to-day Jeannette Latour, jogging humbly but how cheerily along the highway; two days more, and—

well, there are thoughts too deep for thinking; and so, as though I move through some luminous haze whose warmth and sweetness are too blessed to care to pierce and look beyond, I find myself stumbling over the ancient, grass-grown trottoir of St. Grinwold's purlieus, till I reach the broad flags of the stately High Street, and soon I am duly calling Mr. Milligan and his myrmidons to account for their enormity in the matter of Dolly's cap. It proves, however, less heinous than it had seemed on the face of it, and mine has been a bootless errand. The coiffuré has simply been overlooked in the hurry of despatching Lina's dress, and, on discovering the omission a little while after, a special messenger has been started off with the forgotten article.

A bootless errand did I say mine had been? Then indeed I am ungrateful. Poor Dolly's cap—of such selfish stuff, with our

upper-crust of disinterestedness, we are made!—might have been abandoned to Reuben's or anybody else's tender mercies, had it not fallen in with my own imperious promptings and yearnings to go in quest of it. All the same, I do honestly think I had rather have lacked my wedding-veil than that Dolly should not have had her cap; and, with a load of care lifted from my really aching brain, I more leisurely retraced my way.

Before I reached the end of the little street in which St. Cross's church was situated, its bell for evensong ceased ringing. So late! and I hastened my steps, coming, as I did so, into light collision with Swithin Glastonbury, who was hurrying to his post. He looked a little surprised at this sudden apparition of me; but there was neither time nor perhaps inclination on either side for more than a brief good

evening, and we passed our opposite ways.

Strive as we will to be blind to the truth, the latter evenings of August bring their silent warning that the year's prime has gone; but still it is early yet, and I can be home by seven, "even if—" and my speculations bring me to the wicket-gate of St. Grimwold's wood—"even if I go home by the old favourite way."

Wistfully I laid my hand upon the gate's crumbling topmost bar, and leaning over, gazed down into the depths of the wood, where the crimson sunrays were fast paling to violet in the filmy gleams of the rising moon and the chill river mists. The birds had settled to silence, and only the low hootings of some unseen owl among the motionless boughs, and a swish of bats' wings flitting to and fro, broke the stillness. From my stand-point, I could dimly discern the empty grave looming up black

through the bluish-grey haze of river exhalation, and the great boulder beyond, threatening, as it seemed, to topple over and roll into the depths below. Not a twist or contortion of those old trees was unfamiliar to me, and the whole scene fascinated me with its weird beauty. Even while I looked, the fading sunrays perished from it, for all their hues still richly dyed the ground beneath my feet; but below, the moon's sway had grown undivided, silvering all the tangle of leaves and wild flowers to daintiest filigree work, and, where her radiance did not fall, deep darkness lay. Down there the gathering night, and its loneliness and silence, these have more charms than terrors for me; and, smiling scornfully away the transitory dread which seized me, I lifted the rusty latch and stepped out of the sunlight among the shadows that even at noontide are never lifted from those dank, broken steps.

Should I not indulge my humour for penetrating the wood by moonlight? Why, its very ghostly reputation hallowed it from real perils! What hindered me from threading my way by the narrow path winding round by the old trysting stone up to the high road again beyond? Just the difference of a little quarter of an hour or so can be no harm. They are worlds too busy up at the cottage to trouble about looking at the clock, and for all they are likely to miss me, the sole motor of their activity, I expect the case is marvelously like unto that performance of Hamlet when it was enacted with the part of Hamlet left out. No, I shall not be missed for ever so long; let me take my time, and leisurely look my last on the place which always for its beauty's sake, and for something which has clothed its old associations in a new garb of inexpressible grace, I have

always loved. Look my last, do I say? Ay, my last in the life I am parting from. When I come here again, it will be not Jeannette Latour who comes, but the proud happy wife of the man my soul so passionately worships.

And so, as I descend, the shadows gather deeper, and their outlines assume sharpness in the fast approaching night. Instinctively my footsteps make for the trysting-stone, but, as I near it, its rugged edges shape themselves into a strange semblance of a human face, a handsome featured one, but distorted with a hideous, mocking grin, irresistibly reminding me of Lady Havering in her moments of assumed sweetness, and when such modicum of esteem as I may entertain for her shrinks to the infinitesimal.

To rid myself of the ugly impression, I make a little circuit among the low bracken

above, fringing on the broad platform with its tenantless grave. Like some black boat-hulk broken from her moorings it looks now, drifting among the shallows of a silver sea. "Charon's boat," I think to myself as I stand gazing down into it, "might have been shaped so. Here is the prow, a little blunted, it is true, but still not ill-fitted to cleave the murky tide of Styx. And here the stern, where that grim, silent old oarsman— Ah!" A little shriek of sudden but excruciating pain interrupts my speculations, for my foot has slipped upon the glass-smooth brink of the hole, and gives way under my weight, throwing me forward with a force that for a second or two almost deprives me of my senses, and when I recover them I find myself stretched helpless, and almost my length in the cold, narrow bed. Silently anathematizing my

own stupidity—though perhaps, too, the illusory dazzle of the moon might have borne some share in the blame—I right the position of my ankle, and make an effort to rise. The effect is torturing. Have I sprained my foot beyond all hope of using? A pretty state of things! What evil genius lured me to this place? Why could I not have gone home in a respectable, straightforward manner, as anybody else would have done, instead of mooning about like a lost shade in this wilderness of shadows till I had come dismally to grief?

And I shudder to think of the hue and cry there will be after me if—but, nonsense, it cannot be so bad as that. A few minutes' patience and this horrible pain will abate, and I shall be able to hobble home. Meantime, what an absurd plight to have brought myself into! and a rather rueful sob of laughter escapes me as I reflect on the bare

possibility of having injured my foot past hope of stirring. Why, in that case, what chance of deliverance is there for me? Who will dream of seeking me out here any more than "the Baron's retainers" conceived such a brilliant notion as to go looking for poor Ginevra in that old oak chest?

And, supposing the inspiration should strike one of those two or three cognizant of my predilection for the haunted wood? Picture their faces when they should come upon me planted bolt upright in the old monk's grave! They would have to look twice at me in my plain brown dress, to assure themselves that I am living flesh, and not the clothed wraith of him who, for so many a year, had lain here crumbling to dust.

The old monk's grave! To me it always seemed that, in some mysterious way, I had known this Grimwold. Perhaps I had, and

did, by those bonds of sympathy which link us through ages with the dead, whose memory thrills strange answering chords in our hearts. How had it been with him in his lonely life, and his lonelier dying? Had the brethren, away in those walls gleaming through the trees, come and found him stretched dead in his gruesome cave yonder, and gently borne him here to his rest, or had Death warned him ere he laid his hand upon him, and left him time to drag himself to his last bed and lay himself down to die? While health and breath were still his, had he ever stretched his length here, and striven to realize what it would be to lie unconscious of all the blessed nature round him, still and cold as the stone itself—as I am tempted to do now? And then, as often I had wondered before—and if the thought was something ghastly, it was not unreasonable—had the dead anchorite lain

here with his stiff hands clasped across his cold breast, and his white face upturned all bare to the pitiless storms and scorching sunshine ?

It would have seemed so ; for not a notch or trace of any covering was discoverable in the smoothly hewn edges of this cavity of six feet by barely two and a half deep, and only the waving branches overhead could have spread their gracious shade, and shed pitying leaves on the dead—and when, generations later, those murderers dragged their victim to the cave there, did no spectre of Hermit Grimwold rise up and warn them from defiling his old earthly home with blood ?

Quick as fancy flies, these speculations chase each other through my brain, while my hands clench on the grave's sides to distract the agonies of the twisted ankle ; and indeed the pain is growing less acute,

and, when it has spent itself through a few seconds longer, there will be nothing to hinder me from getting out of my strange resting place. It is high time, for I hear the quarter before eight striking from Havering church-tower, and the air is growing icy cold, and I shiveringly draw my light summer cloak (which I had quite two opinions of bringing with me at all) close round me. Even the moonlight has grown fitful, and large, black clouds obscure her bright face for minutes together. The silence is almost unendurable, and I long with indescribable yearning for the sound of a human voice. I think, if it were my dearest foe, my sworn enemy—— How ceaselessly the shadows sway to and fro up there on the steps, as if some strong breeze stirred the boughs, and yet the night is airless. There, for example, with a curious jerking, defined motion, as though striving to pierce down

here among the depths—nay, hush ! hush ! no shadow that, but a woman's cloaked figure, stealthily and cautiously winding down the broken steps ! Tall, and, for all it is enveloped from head to foot in some dark shawl or hooded mantle, its ungainly outlines assert themselves in a manner at once suggestive of Abigail Sharples.

A most preposterous notion ! for what should she be finding to do here at such an hour ? How is it that when anything abnormally ugly or repulsive meets my eye, I incontinently begin to call up visions of Lady Havering's waiting-woman ? Why, is she not, of course, some poor creature from St. Grimwold's, content to brave all the ghosts in Christendom for an apronful of firewood. As she reaches the lowermost step the moon clears, and the woman pushes back the hood concealing her face. Like steel her eyes glint in the cold light as it

breaks in dazzling effulgence; eyes which, beyond all manner of question, belong to Mrs. Abigail Sharples.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

WHAT can the woman be wanting here? or whom? Clearly I am not this time the object of her attentions. This is the very last place in the world she would dream of seeking me in to-night. What wretched ill-luck if her needle-sharp eyes should have caught sight of me! But there is some chance in my favour; for the sight of her has petrified me to the stillness of the grey stone around me, and, with an instinctive attempt at concealment, I drag off my hat, and thrust it down by my

side, while hastily drawing the cloak about my head, I sink to a level with the plateau of stone; lying straight and still as the dead Grimwold himself once lay in that selfsame place. To a shade my alpaca cloak matches the surface surrounding me; and I know from experience that the intervening trees and low bushes shut out the grave from the point of view Mrs. Sharples has taken up. But though I believe, almost as entirely as I hope, that she has not caught sight of me, I can see her quite plainly; and my hopes gather strength, as I mark her unstartled statuesque demeanour, or is she feigning not to have seen me? Who can tell? But what on earth is she here for?

Swiftly she makes her way towards my living sepulchre by the identical path which brought me to it; but on the platform's verge, she takes a lateral direction, and strides hurriedly into the cave's mouth,

where, coming to a momentary halt, she sweeps a comprehensive glance into the semi-obscurity, for the moon is veiled now in a bank of filmy clouds. And so turning she disappears within the cave, and I can see her no more. I wish I could, for the first time in my life, I wish I could. Obnoxious as her visible presence may be, the sensation of her unseen imminence is as hateful as that which one might experience in the neighbourhood of some venomous lurking snake or crocodile creature. Will she dart forth presently, and claw at some victim? or is she here to play out some new version of her old favourite eaves-dropping performance? But who is likely to—Listen! listen! A rustling among the bushes behind me, and footsteps—half muffled by the dying leaves, yet whose tread I should know among a thousand—Morton's—coming by the little path.

In search of me ?

My heart bounds, and my first impulse is to spring up, with never a thought to spare for the tenanted cave, and run to meet him. But the slight preliminary effort to move my foot sends a shiver of agony through every nerve and fibre, and the enforced moment of inaction brings me consideration of whether or not I shall proclaim our presence to the spy yonder by calling to him, or only first convey to him the silent intimation of her being there when I reach his side ? But how am I to hobble to him standing so near, and yet so far for me ! How gracious and noble he looks ! leaning motionless and silent against the great stone, glancing round with something of perplexity lining his brow, as though he half expected to find some one there before him. Should it be me ? Well, I am not so far off, and will he take me for a ghost when

at last he condescends to discard that magnificent pose, and turn his eyes earthward.

I see how it is, clearly enough. He has been, of course, to Cliffe Cottage, and, learning my absence, has come in search of me here. A very sensible proceeding, but still not the most practical way of all in the world of carrying it out; for to look at you, most noble Signor, one would rather imagine that, instead of coming to seek, you were waiting to be sought. But I would stake my existence that it is not by Mrs. Sharples. Rather than encounter her, you would escape to the world's end; I know that, and yet—oh! patience can hold out no longer. I must hint to him of my whereabouts; and, grasping the edges of my narrow prison, I lift myself back into a sitting posture. His name is on my lips—
“Morton!”

And he turns quickly, but not to me, for

even as I speak, another voice calls to him.

Isoline's!

Ay! there on the identical spot Abigail Sharples made hideous ten minutes ago, my sister stands now, like an angel of purity and brightness, in her light long, soft dress, with her straw hat daugling from the hand lifted to push back the golden ripples of hair from her white forehead. A faint flush dyes her cheek, and there is a troubled, half-scared look in her deep blue eyes, as she bends from the framing of dark, interlacing boughs, shining amid the brilliant moonlight radiance the most transient of visions, and wonderingly murmurs his name.

"Isoline! You?" he cries, at least as wonderingly.

"Yes, yes. Have you found her?" demands she, glancing hurriedly round. "Have you found her?"

"Found whom?" he asks, with leisurely curiosity. "What does it all mean?"

"Jeannette. Can't you find her? Isn't she here? She has never been home. Haven't you come here to look for her?"

"Not come home!" he interrupts, with a trifling increase of energy. "Where has she been then?"

"To St. Grimwold's—this afternoon—all of a hurry."

"What for?" he demands, in sharp haste.

"Ah! I was afraid you'd think it odd of her; but, you see," pleaded Lina, deprecatingly, "poor Dolly was in such a way about her cap, and so Netta offered to go and see after it."

"And was there no one," he coldly demanded, "but Jeannette to go after it?"

"Why, yes, of course," said Lina, reproachfully, lifting her eyes to his face.

"Anybody could have gone, but you know what Netta is."

"Upon my honour," he said, with a shrug, "I am not so sure that I do. And so Dolly's cap was her sole ex—— reason for going to St. Grimwold's?"

"She said she'd be glad of the walk; but she ought to have been back an hour ago."

"Ah!"

"And—oh! what can have become of her?"

"And you: why did you come here? To look for her?"

"Well—yes."

"But you hesitate."

"Did I? Well—because I do so hate this place," she said, with a shiver, and drawing a step nearer to her old lover. "It's unaccountable to me how Jeannette ever can dare to come here alone."

"Yet you have done it now."

"I peeped over, but I don't believe I could have ventured down, if Mrs. Sharples hadn't told me your groom told her he saw Netta pass in here, as he was coming home from St. Grimwold's about an hour ago. Is that how you knew it?"

"No," he said, shortly; "I don't know that I had any expectation of finding her here."

"Then why——"

"Don't be so troubled about her, Isoline," he interrupted. "Perhaps the wonderful cap has detained her, you know," he went on, forcing a smile, "or perhaps, by this time, while you have been running about after her, she may be home again even."

"You are so cool about it," said she, indignantly.

"No, not cool. Not in the least. But Jeannette has errant propensities, especially under moonlight conditions like these."

"One would suppose," pouted Lina, "that she was a sort of lunatic, to hear you talk."

"No, no," he said. "I only mean that there is no cause for you to be anxious. If it had been yourself, Lina, I might have felt really—— Where are you going?"

"Home again," she said, preparing for a move in that direction.

"Wait a minute, Isoline. You—how is it you didn't seem surprised at finding me here?"

"Why should I have been? I supposed you came to look, as I did, for my sister."

"But I told you that I did not. I repeat I hadn't the faintest notion that she was from home, and I intended looking in as a matter of course—you understand?"

She nodded.

"As a matter of course at Cliffe Cottage before——"

"Before going home."

"Quite so. After I had kept my appointment here with—you understand?"

"With whom?"

"My dear—I beg your pardon—Isoline. I haven't the vaguest idea. When I saw you I—I fancied it must be with yourself."

"I don't understand you, Sir Morton," she said coldly.

"I see you do not," he rejoined. "Any more than I—Don't mistake me, Isoline—don't imagine that I was such an egregious coxcomb as to flatter myself that you—for pity's sake, don't think that."

"Think what?" she asked, not perhaps quite unreasonably.

"That so much of the old—regard—interest—you once had for me still remained as to——"

"I have no less," she said, after a brief silence, "than I ever had. As to do what, Sir Morton?"

"As to write this," he said, desperately dragging a folded sheet of note-paper from his pocket. Tearing it open, he thrust it into her hands.

"In any case," she said, glancing at the end of the scrip, "I should not be ashamed of putting my real name, as the writer of this seems to be."

"That alone might have told me it was not you," he said, humbly. "And as to the vile scrawl—read it, Isoline. Read it out loud. Perhaps your voice will help me to some light upon it."

And she read,

"SIR MORTON HAVERING,

"The person who is to be your wife on Thursday morning does not love you. Do not be affraid, she will be true to you, fore she has sworn to be . . . She will not play—you false—as—" (There is

no cloud upon the moon now, and yet Lina's voice faints into indistinctness, but rallies again bravely) "as—that uther one did. But her love is all givven to the parson——"

"That is too much!" burst forth Lina.
"I do know how to spell, *I* hope."

"Spell?"

"Yes, afraid with two ff's, and u for other."

"I did not notice."

"And should I have called Mr. Glastonbury 'parson'? really——"

"Oh! Then it does mean Mr. Glastonbury?"

"Of course it does,"—she stopped in utter confusion. "That is——"

"Ay, I supposed it did. Read on, child," he said, sternly.

"But," she continued, in trembling tones,

"he does not know it. Your honner is quite safe. *'I cannot be your wife, I am bound beyond all hope.'*"

"Mark that," interrupted Morton, "beyond all hope. Well?"

"*Beyond all hope to another.* The writer of these lines heard her say those very words wen he asked her to marry him. I think it is right that you should know this, and if you want to know more, be to-night in St. Grimwold's wood at the grate stone near the Hermit's Cave at eight o'clock.

"Your Well-wisher."

"Your cruellest enemy!" flashed forth Lina. "When did you receive this?" she imperiously demanded.

"An hour ago."

"By post?"

"No. Some strange man left it, with orders for it to be delivered at once into my

hands, Lady Havering said. She brought it me herself."

"And you believed this hideous lie."

"I—came here to learn what motive—"

"How could you be so duped?" she said, with a smile of contemptuous pity.

"I had rather be duped ten times over than run the risk of doing her a wrong," he said.

"I tell you it is some infamous fabrication. She loves you with all her heart and soul."

"You led me to believe so."

"And I would do it again."

"And so much affection, Isoline, as was mine to give, I have given her. But it was a poor gift enough to place beside what I thought was her rich freight of love for me. And now to think it should prove empty after all. Heavens! I am well served. What a mockery of a marriage!" and turning

from Isoline, he began to pace to and fro like a caged animal. "But I did not deceive her," he went on, stopping abruptly, and speaking more to himself than to his companion. "I don't think I deceived her. She knew, as no other could know, of your—of that wretched mistake. She knew it all."

"And yet you doubt her. Oh! but you do not. You cannot. Think of all she bore for your sake—and mine. Think, before she could do that, what her love must have been. Indeed, Sir Morton, she is worthy of yours."

"A poor gift enough for such as she is," he groaned. "How was it, do you think, Isoline? What could she find in me to care for? If she really——"

"You vex yourself," interrupted Lina, with a smile, "with things that are past your comprehension. Be content that she does care for you."

"I should be so indeed," he said, with a contrite air. "What a dense blockhead I must have been, not to have found it out for myself," he added. "And I never should, that is quite certain, if you had not.—How on earth did you discover it?" he asked, turning abruptly on her.

"I didn't," laughed she, uneasily. "It would not have been possible to do that. Why, she would have killed me if she had fancied I so much as guessed at it."

"You did guess it."

"You know I told you that I did," she answered, looking frankly up at him.

"But how—why?"

"Because I did."

"That is a woman's answer," he said, impatiently.

"And am I not a woman?"

"I believe it is true that women have second sight. But it is deceptive some-

times, Isoline. Do you understand me?"

"No. Unless you mean that you doubt her still."

"I do."

"Upon what grounds?"

"Upon this here in my hand," he answered, tapping the letter he had taken from her.

"What sort of proof is that?" she said, laughing contemptuously.

"There never was smoke without fire, and——"

"And you fritter away her truthfulness and honour upon a silly old saying, and a miserable written falsehood, as that letter is?"

"I do not, Isoline."

"Where is your witness, this fine friend who appoints to meet you here, like some mysterious mask in a melodrama?"

"There is no word of appointing to

meet," he replied, referring to the paper. "Simply it says, 'be in St. Grimwold's wood at eight o'clock to-night.' "

"And were you not here?" she demanded. "Why, as I laid my hand on that gate, I heard eight striking. So much for your suspicions. I suppose you did not expect to come upon poor Jeannette and—and 'the parson' here in close confabulation? Poor Mr. Glastonbury! Really," and she laughed mockingly, "I do think you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Was this my sister's self, or something of my bolder, more impetuous nature asserting itself in hers? At least, her tones told me she was speaking with an effort.

"Poor Glastonbury!" echoed Sir Morton, gloomily.

"And," she hurried on, "not the ghost of him, or of Jeannette, or of any creature here at all, but yourself and—and——"

“And you,” he said, gazing down dreamily at her. “Only you and I, Lina.”

“And it is quite time I went,” she said, briskly, but with averted face.

“Stay a moment, Isoline. Why should you be in such a hurry? Tell me this—I have a right to know. Is Jeannette aware of his love for her?”

“That letter says she is; and since you place such faith in it——”

“How hard you are!” he said, bitterly. “You will not give me a plain answer to a plain question.”

“It is one which you would do better to put to her than to me, if you must be satisfied,” she replied, in the same chill voice. “Is it fair, Sir Morton, for you to catechize me about this? Have you any right—you who have won what that man would perhaps have died to win—to look into his

trouble like this? Leave him and his griefs alone. We must all have them."

"You seem exempt, Isoline," he retorted.

"Do I?" she said, faintly smiling.

"Are you not?" he insisted.

"Really I must go," was all her response.

"They will be beating up the neighbourhood for me next. And you too, Sir Morton. *Is* this the way now to find Jeannette?"

"Jeannette is all right," he said, still with his eyes riveted on her beautiful face, flushing and paling beneath his gaze.

"All right!" she said. "Really you can't be accused of being a paladin. You're too provoking!"

"Jeannette is a sensible woman," sighed my ardent lover, "and does not expect to find a paladin in me. She understands me too well."

"And you," she said, "reward this most profound knowledge of hers by pretending to doubt her, whether she——"

"I did no such thing!" he cried, vehemently. "I hold her for truest gold."

"It hardly seemed so just now," she said, quietly, "but that shameful scrap of paper," she went on, indignantly, "who could have invented such a transparent piece of malice? It vexed you till you did not know what you were saying. That is, you——"

"Child!" he broke forth, wildly, "don't try to find excuses for me. You are right, I did not know. I did not know. No, no, it was not her I doubted. It is myself—myself! My God! I shall go mad! I shall go mad!" and clenching his hands against his temples, he turned from her, and flung himself down upon the stone, as though he were striving to shut out the sight of her.

Motionless as death he lay there, save for the low convulsive breathing shaking his frame.

And she, standing where he had turned from her, still and pale as a woman marble-stricken, some word she strove to speak frozen upon her parted lips, and in her eyes fixed on him, a look——nay, was it that I could not, or that I dared not read it?

CHAPTER V.

TOO LATE !

AT last she stirred ; and, with gentle but resolute step, came beside him, and laid her hand lightly on his arm.

“ Morton.”

“ Go away !” he cried, starting to his feet, and turning fiercely upon her. “ Leave me alone. Temptress ! Woman ! Your touch burns into every vein of me like fire. Why do you come torturing me like this ? Is it not enough for you to see what your cruelty and deceit have brought me to ? Driven me to despise myself for the hideous

wrong I have committed against her—and—that other. Do you see what I have done? Do you see how I have wrecked two of the best and noblest lives God ever gave to purify His world with? But for me she would have been his wife——”

“No! no!” she cried, entreatingly, “no, no, I tell you——”

“But for me—for you,” he whirled on, unheeding, “it would have been so. Only we have spoiled all that! That is our handiwork. You smile, you are proud of it?”

“You don’t know what you are saying,” she sighed out, sinking despairingly down upon an old ragged tree-stump beside her.

“Ay, but I do—too well. It is easy enough. It is simply that I presumed to offer her that which you toyed with, till you tired of it, and then threw away. And you might have done that, Lina,” he went

on, in softened tones, "you might even have done that, for my love for you was so great that my life was all yours, to make or mar as you pleased. I was at your mercy as I am now. All yours, but not, do you hear, not for you to shift over to her, who just cared for me so much as her generous heart always cares for anything that moves her pity."

"She loves you," persisted Lina, in the anguish-wrung accents of a perishing martyr.

"Yes, I tell you, yes. I know she does, with the liking that pity breeds. Just as I care for her, out of that admiration and esteem which no man nor woman either can know her, and not have. But I do not love her any more than she loves me, God help us both—I do not love her."

With calm, clear emphasis the words came through the deadly silence to my ear, and fell with all their leaden weight

into my heart. One instant it quivered in its awful agony, and then it seemed to lie numbed and lifeless as my cold limbs that, when I strove to stir, refused to obey my will. And that low laugh, like a demon's jeer of triumph—or was it only the hootings of the owl in the cave's clefts? It served, at least, to remind me of the hateful presence there. Hush! A voice at last. Isoline's, but so strangely spiritless and sad.

"Shall we go home, Sir Morton?"

"Home?" he said, in absent, listless tones.

"Back to Havering," she falteringly explained.

"You call Havering home. Do you know what it is to me—this place? Shall I tell you? Stay, first I will tell you what it was."

"But——"

"Listen," he insisted, coming beside her. "Yet no, I cannot tell you. No language ever coined the words to paint what this little spot of English ground came to be for me when I believed that you loved me."

"Sir Morton! Why will you go back to that time?"

"Listen, I say. You shall know why. You are listening? Well, till that time I had no pleasure in the place. 'A poor thing,' Touchstone says, 'but mine own, sir.' But that did not hold good for me, Isoline. My own the place certainly was, but it seemed a dull, monotonous, desert island of a spot to me, after the whirl of those gay southern cities where I have spent half my life. My social conditions at Havering Court itself were—not cheerful, and I hated the place; and my one thought came to be how I could most gracefully get away from it again. That problem was

just revolving in my mind on that evening—do you remember it?—when we first met face to face in Bogslush Lane. And I carried the memory of you home in my heart, and all the little world about me grew bright with it ; and when that strange chance threw us for days together into each other's society, then, Isoline, I would not have given my few poor acres for all the kingdoms under the sun, and when—but I dare not look back to that time—why should I? What was it, after all, but a fool's paradise? And when I was cast out of it—well, we do not miss what we have never known, and I had never been a carpet-knight, and, before I came here, my life had been, voluntarily, rather an isolated one, but when you took back from me all that you had given——”

“No ! no !” she wailed.

“I beg your pardon—pretended to

give, I should have said. Then Havering grew to be a hell upon earth to me, only wanting that crowning torture—the one, I mean, of looking round and seeing the misery my coming had somehow created—and my first impulse was to hurry back to my bachelor quarters in the old, half-ruined Florentine palace; there, at least, it would be lonely and loveless. And what points those were in its favour! But I thrust the temptation from me, for Jeannette lay dying, it was thought, and common gratitude—that is such a poor, mean word to express the sense of all that great debt I owed her—bound me. I had looked at the little deserted home, I tell you, Isoline, and thought what it would have been still, but for my ill-starred self, and could I leave her at such a time? You—oh! but there is no blame to you. Her illness was made light of to you, I know—you more than a

thousand miles away, and she, poor girl, among total strangers to her. And so I lingered on at the 'Golden Star,' waiting for the crisis. It seemed to me that heaven's verdict upon her would be mine; but I should only be wasting words to tell you of all the misery of that time. Your sympathy, if you had it to spare for me, I tell you plainly, I would hardly thank you for. It is enough to say that her sufferings reflected themselves in me, dimly, of course, because I retained my bodily and mental faculties, while she, poor child, lay in fever torments, and her brain wandering strangely—very strangely. Althea Cleveland, Job's comforter that she was, seemed to take a delight in hinting to me of the burden of her delirium.

“ ‘It is of you, Morton,’ she would say, ‘that she talks incessantly ;’ and then Althea would absolutely have a sort of

smile on her kind old face. 'I shall not tell you though all the flattering things she says of you.'

"Heaven forbid! And, I am afraid, my reminder that such ravings were no proof, but rather the contrary of—any kind feeling Jeannette might entertain for me in her sane moments was rather a brusque one; but Miss Cleveland always claimed her privilege of the last word, and would declare, on her brother's authority, that my view of the case was an old superstitious fallacy. Many a time I have turned from the poor lady, vexed to the soul with her. When I thought of your sister's pure, proud heart, that, in my mind, I always compared with some costly jewelled shrine, which spreads its rich beams across all that passes near it, but guards jealously its one inmost treasure, till its true lord and owner should come to claim it; and it seemed

hateful to me that even such gentle, tender hands as Althea Cleveland's should attempt to tamper with it.

“And so the tedious, terrible time passed, and the day came when life won the victory for Jeannette. That same day, Isoline, brought me your letter—your letter that said little enough, and yet so much—and that meant so well, yet has worked a curse. You strove to right, as best you could, something of the wrong you had wrought, but I believed then, as I feel sure now, that your discernment was at fault. ‘You fancied it possible,’ you said, ‘that I might win Jeannette for my wife.’ Why and wherefore you thought so, you did not vouchsafe to explain. What made you dream such a thing?”

“It was no dream,” she said, shiveringly, and he bent and tenderly wrapped her white shawl close about her. “It—she

was more worthy of you," she went on, "than ever I could have been. She is as good as you are," she added, with simple gravity, after a moment's pause.

"Infinitely superior," he rejoined, with a faint smile and a shrug.

"She is just your equal," insisted Isoline authoritatively. "It was the most reasonable thing in the world that all—I thought, all I knew, I mean, should be true."

"But, child, what did you know?"

"Nothing—that is, I—when it was put before me, when, of course, that is to say, I put it before myself, I could see how reasonable it was that you should not care for me."

"Not care for you, my darling?"

"Morton! Morton!" she wailed, rising from her seat, and supplicatingly lifting her clasped hands to him, "tell me, what does it mean? What have I done?"

“What have you done?” he cried, seizing her by the wrist in his frenzied agony. “What did you do? Why, devils could not have devised such a clever torment as that, when you planned to go away and lie in wait there a thousand miles off till your plot had come to its miserable maturity, and then,” and as he spoke he shook her off so roughly that she stumbled and fell against the tree, “and then came back,” he whirled on, “to see your victim’s writhings. Why could you not stay in your lair? I might have borne it then, I might have striven honestly to be true to her, and she—at least she should never have known what empty mockeries my marriage vows were. But now—Lina! Lina!” and, as the old familiar name broke from his lips, all the frenzy calmed down into low yearning tenderness, “why did you come back, my love, my love,” and bending over her he clasped

his arms about her and caught her convulsively to him, "with your sweet dear face that has haunted me, waking and sleeping, since last I held you so, in my arms, and you said—No, no, you could not, it was some hideous nightmare of a dream, my dear, and I thought you said you did not love me. But no," he piteously implored, dragging one hand across his haggard eyes, and then gazing down on the pale face pillowed on his shoulder, he passionately kissed the closed eyes where a life of infinite peace and content hovered, such as sometimes illumines the face of the dead. "No, you never said that."

Had she striven to answer? I could only see that her lips parted tremulously.

"Speak to me, darling," he entreated, "only tell me you never said that."

"I never said it, Morton," she murmured, in clear, distinct tones.

"God bless you, my dear, for that," he sighed, with a long deep breath. "And it was all a lie then."

"It would have been a lie if I had said so."

For a while he gazed at her in silence, as if he were trying to read the calm sad face.

"And yet," he said, at last, "you could do what you did."

"It was all I could do for you—for I—thought you loved Jeannette, and that she cared for you."

"Great Heaven! We never gave you cause for such thought."

"And just because you did not, I believed it ten times more. I thought I saw it all so plainly. Jeannette is so generous and unselfish, so brave-hearted, so worthy of you, Morton, and when in time I was persuaded—came to be certain, I mean you know, of it, I felt like some poor blind

creature from whose eyes the scales had fallen, and I saw—I believed I saw so clearly the truth of it all, and the sacrifice you had both made for me.”

“Sacrifice !”

“It dawned upon me,” she went on, “not all at once. It was so hard to give up—to give up your love, until I remembered that it could never really have been mine, that I could only hold its seeming, and she its reality——”

“Did you take me then for some idiot who did not know his own mind, when I asked you to be my wife?” he demanded. “Upon my honour, child, one would think you had supposed that injured foot of mine had in some way superinduced a damaged brain, that I should love one woman and ask the other to marry me.”

“Our knowledge of each other was so short,” she replied. “I did not doubt that,

when you asked me that day under the old tree to be your wife, you thought you cared for me."

"That was generous of you," he said, bitterly.

"It was afterwards," she went on, wincing a little, "afterwards, when you came to know all that Jeannette really was, that I believed you repented of your words to me. It seemed—have I not told you so?—to dawn upon me. Most of all when I sat at work, and listened to you both chatting about a thousand things that I yawned over, because they were miles beyond what I could understand. What a 'splendid companion' she was, you said to me one day, do you remember?"

"I daresay I did," he replied, carelessly. "What then?"

"Well, only for hours after I sat and pondered to myself whether, if I studied

days and days, and nights and nights, I could ever come to be like her."

"And what then?" he reiterated, "if you had——"

"What then! Then I might have hoped to have kept your love. But it is no matter. I knew that all the grammars and histories in the world could not have made me different."

"All the same, it would have been a perilous experiment," he said, gazing down with a sad smile on her fair, upturned face.

"They could not have helped me, I know," she went on. "Jeannette and I are so different by nature."

"Utterly."

"And so—one day—— It was that day we walked together as far as the gate there to St. Grimwold's, and then it grew dark, and

some spots of rain began to fall, do you recollect?"

"Am I likely ever to forget?" he groaned.

"I turned back——"

"Yes, yes?"

"That—then—all at once I came to feel sure I was right about Jeannette."

"And why just then? In the pouring rain? It was an odd inspiration at such a time, surely?" he said. "Have you told me the truth in all this, Isoline?"

"Sir Morton!" she said, struggling, and successfully, for her freedom.

"Forgive me, Lina. It is all so—perplexing. Perhaps, if you explain a little more——"

"There is no more to explain," she replied. "You know the rest."

"Ay," he muttered, "by the bitterest ex-

perience that ever man went through. But tell me——”

“No. Don’t ask me any more,” she said. “I cannot tell you. I am a coward. I dare not look back to that time. If you ever—cared for me—ever so little, Sir Morton, let me go now.”

But he held her fast.

“Child! Child! You are still mine. You shall not go. It is not too late yet.”

“It is too late,” she said. “You are bound in honour to Jeannette.”

“Honour! And she has no love for me!”

“On that letter’s lying word, she has not. Do you accept its testimony, or mine?”

And she gently disengaged the hands he still grasped, and stood confronting him with her pure, frank eyes.

“How can the writer of that, even if her motive——”

“*Her?* *Her* motive?”

"His or hers," she answered, letting her eyelids drop in confusion for an instant. "I say that, even if the motive was pure, how can the writer of that know Jeannette as I know her? I tell you, Sir Morton, with all her heart and soul she is yours."

"Give me proof of it," he said, sternly.

"I could do that," she calmly replied, "but I would die rather than give it."

He stood staring at her in mute perplexity.

"It would bring shame," she went on, "upon—upon——"

"Whom? Not upon her," he challenged.

"Least of all upon her," she answered, proudly. "Excepting so far as her shame must be your shame now, and her honour yours."

"But——"

"And so, for her sake, for your own—for mine then," she pleaded, when still he stood stern and immovable.

"Let it be so," he said at last.

"I would thank you for that," she said, in tones faint with their hopeless weariness, "but—— Good night, Sir Morton."

"Lina! Lina!" he cried, seizing her outstretched hand with an agonized grip. "God never made his creatures for such hell-tortures as this! We cannot part so!"

"How else? Good night," she said again.

There are tears glistening, bright as diamonds in the moonlight, upon Isoline's white face, and her fixed and dilated eyes shine with unearthly lustre as she slowly moves from him towards the steps; and all the while he stands where she left him, gazing after her with a stony stare, and the lines of weariness and apathy which for these months past, have been asserting themselves on brow and lips suddenly deepening there as though traced by a sculptor's chisel into

hopeless despair, until at last she stands upon the lowermost step. Then, before she can set foot upon the next one, he is beside her.

"Isoline!"

And she turns inquiringly.

"You cannot go home alone."

"Why not?" she calmly asks.

"It is not right—not safe along that dreary road, all alone!"

"All alone," she echoes, with a little smile. "But I shall do well enough."

"You forget," he urges, "that I live in Havering as well as you do."

"Of course," she says. "Yes."

"And I have a sort of right to look after you now. Have I not? Why, what would Jeannette say, if she knew that I——"

"But, Sir Morton," she says, turning full upon him with uplifted, emphasising hand, and looking down into his face with great

earnest eyes, "she never must know of that which has happened here to-night."

"Certainly not. And I may come with you?"

"If you like."

And so like a fading dream, the two pass up together out of my sight, and I am alone.

CHAPTER VI.

“DE PROFUNDIS.”

ALONE! No, would that I had been! My ordeal might have been more endurable then. Had I been alone, I should have risen up in my living grave, type of what all the years, many or few, of my life to come must be. I should not have lain lurking there, but have risen up and made my presence patent, or—always supposing that my foot would have been available—stolen away, or—but it was useless to speculate. How could I tell what course I should have taken, any more than I knew

whether I had followed the right one now ? How was it possible to think calmly, or even to think at all, with the echo of those words dazing all my senses, and searing into my brain ?—"I do not love her ! I do not love her !"

What signified the rest ?

And she had overheard it all. That woman lurking in there had come to listen to the story of my shame. For what else but shame is it, to be, as I was doomed to be, an unloved bride ? Come to listen and triumph over me, what else could have brought her there ? and who but she or one of her tools had written that letter ? Yet what could her object be ? Some forlorn struggle on Lady Havering's part, through this willing cats-paw of hers, to drag back Sir Morton to her own ends, and sever the last cord, poor fragile thing that it was, binding him to

us—to me. Still there lay one day before her last hope would be gone for ever ; and in one day the work of years and years can be annihilated.

I fancied I knew Mrs. Sharples ; and so I might to a degree have known her ; and it demanded no superhuman powers of discernment to perceive that her lively imagination, excited by my sudden expedition to St. Grimwold's, which she in some way had got wind of, had devised the notion of bringing about this meeting between Lina and Sir Morton Havering, and then to-morrow, with her smooth, hypocritical tongue, she would—I saw it all—have condolingly related to me the outcome of her observations. But then how could she have anticipated any such results ? What possible ground had she for imagining that things were not what they seemed ? When Lina's engagement had been broken off, the affair had been a nine

days' wonder in Havering, and my own engagement had afforded food for discussion for quite double that mystic period; but how this woman had gotten together any inkling of actual facts at her lean fingers' ends was best known to herself, and something besides that was still all dark to me, she clearly also knew. Yet this conviction was obvious to me, that she had reckoned on being sole spectator to the scene which had just played itself out. Truly she had a way of knowing more of myself than often I could claim to comprehend, but still her prescience could hardly have reached to any conception of my being in St. Grimwold's wood to-night. And how would the unexpected addition of my presence affect her plans? Always, of course, supposing that she has seen me, as in every probability she has, though it is just possible that the shadows and negative tints of my dress and surround-

ings had successfully aided my attempt to keep myself hidden.

From my point of vantage, I could perfectly command a view of the cave's mouth, and all Mrs. Abigail's struggles to see and not be seen, which had been so farcical that, at the outset, I had almost betrayed myself by my choking laughter, until presently I came to forget her very presence at all. Yet these contortions must have continued to the end, and been so troublesome that it was just possible her attentions had been entirely absorbed by their claims upon her.

Like a tough cable that holds through some whirling sea, my natural antagonism to this woman served me in good turn in this fierce trial hour, and saved me from sinking beneath my crushing misery. Come what might, this pest had to be grappled with, and in such a vigorous fashion as to leave her no chance for the future. What her

weapons would be I knew very well, how she could cast in my teeth the barbed steel of Sir Morton's asseveration, and mock me till I writhed with the anguish of the torture. Well, let her do her worst, there was no time to count my cost, and I would close with her to the death—now.

She should not leave this spot till I had brought her miserable tongue to confess all, little or much as it might be, that she knew. And I rose, eager for the contest, with the intent of dragging her from her lair; and fell back as suddenly with a low groan from the pain of my foot. But was that poor little scrap of muscle to come between me and my righteous revenge? Hardly, and I was in the act of renewing my efforts when I caught a sudden glimpse of Mrs. Abigail's face, white to chalkiness, against the cave's inky background, peering fearfully forth, with eyes that seemed to be starting

from their sockets, fixed in petrified stare on my ambush. Ay! at least she sees me now. Very well, then she shall come to me, and, as calmly as pain mental and bodily will let me, I call to her by her name; but scarcely recognise my own voice, it sounds so hollow and so low that it can hardly have reached to the cave's distance even, and once again I repeat my summons.

“Abigail Sharples.”

With the scared eyes still riveted on me, she starts forward on to the platform like a galvanised corpse, and I, rising slowly to a sitting posture, stretch forth one arm and beckon her.

“Abigail Sharples! come——”

One sharp piercing screech that frights the sleeping denizens of the wood from their propriety, and then under cover of the owls and bats, whom it has sent careering wildly in every direction, she turns and flies madly

up the steps, as if all the witches and demons of Walpurgis Night were at her heels ; while I sink down on the edge of the grave, sobbing with hysterical laughter and tears of disappointment, at the escape of my prey ; and with just enough reason left to console myself with the reflection that not Atalanta's own foot could have come up with the conscience and terror-stricken woman.

And so what next ? Seated there on the edge of the grave, alone at last, with only the consciousness of that which as yet I dared not face to bear me company, and the haunting remembrance that this life of mine which sunders their happiness, is yet more hateful to me. I look towards the great stone, dreaming for one brief instant of that sunny June day, not two little months ago, but only to waken again to remember the curse that time, so blessed to me, must have been to this man, who, out

of some mistaken sense of honour, had forced his generosity to such a pass. And then, picturing to myself the sharp descent from the boulder to the river below, it seems to me that, if ever self-murder were justifiable, mine would be, for what is my miserable mission in this world, but to blight the lives of the best and dearest to me, and to draw my own breath in the pain of a loveless existence? And then the old familiar words of the soul-distracted Dane, not one whit the less significant because I have heard them droned a hundred times at school with dire, meaningless monotony, and bellowed perhaps twice or thrice by ranting Thespians, steal like heaven's saving breath across my heart. Ay, but for that "canon 'gainst self-slaughter," such a thing might be; but did it not rule uncanceled, mighty as ever, bidding men and women bend as they might, to the ground, to deso-

lation's deepest depths, to injustice, to oppression, to misery of whatsoever sort, but to break—never!

And yet how was I to live on?—I who had, not one short hour ago, felt so proudly secure of my happiness? Had I indeed and truly felt so? Well, let it pass; at least I knew the high, pure nobility of Morton Havering's nature; and while something of a pang that its first great love had not been mine gnawed my memory, it had brought its more than compensating conviction that a time must come when my own devotion would atone to him in full for that gift which had been torn from him. It was to have been my life's end and aim to have striven for that.

But now that could never be, because forsooth it had been at her bidding, had he not said it?—to please her—caprices, that he had asked me to be his wife;

and I am beholden to her for this honour he has done me, and the compact on his side was all a forced one, with not one poor little gem of true spontaneous affection to engender the rich after-math I had dreamed of. Only some chilly chivalrous, quixotic sense of esteem to give me. Oh! the humiliation of it all! To think I had so miserably betrayed myself, I who believed I had cased my love in such steel-proof panoply that I had shut it in even to myself, where had been its vulnerable point? And that she, from whom of all others I had toiled unceasingly to hide it, should have discovered it! Well, I had no thanks to offer her. But how had she found out the truth? My quiet-minded, not dull or unobservant, but certainly rather indolent and curiously uninquisitive—judged by the ordinary feminine standard—sister. Was it possible that in some manner I had through

all these years formed a wrong estimate of Isoline's character ? and that under-lying its smooth tranquil surface, ran some swift current of ugly poisonous falsity and deceit ; or was it some heavenly well-spring of utter self-renunciation and sacrifice, such as one reads of, and finds so hard, so very hard to believe in ?

No, I measured humanity by my own individual standard of it—and I was not all selfish—but to have been as she had been, first and pre-eminently possessor of his love, and voluntarily to have resigned it over to any other woman—— No, that was not in nature. Thank heaven it was not ! Could I have been guilty of such superhuman generosity to her ? And since no middle course was possible, there lay the conclusion's uttermost extreme : to write her down as hollow-hearted, false, and fickle a coquette as ever made a man's life a bur-

den to him. A heartless, beautiful simulacrum of a woman, whose only passion was a vanity which could trample down every decency to feed its insatiate greed, and—oh! I could see through it all—clear as the cold moonlight around me, could I not see how, unappalled by the mischief she had once wrought, she had come back now to crown it with a fiendish malice.

Oh! my seeming fair sister, with your star-
gleaming eyes and soft white face, pillowed up
on his breast in languorous ecstasy, and your
hard, cold, despicable flint of a heart, is it
by insulting his manhood so that you think
to amuse yourself? and are pleased to think
you will steal him from me! and then, when
you have done it, to turn round upon him
and say—"It was all a jest—God be with
you!" and so away again, across the seas,
to try whether Teutonic hearts may not be
gambled away in the same sort of fashion.

No doubt. No doubt they can be. Men all the world over, and ever since Eden's gates were closed on Father Adam, do seem to enjoy being worsted in love's game, till it is too late to retrieve a single piece, and then—Oh, Lina! to think your treachery could reach so far as this! so far that how am I to know that letter itself is not a part of it, and that in some way you and that woman Sharples—No, no, that would be too miserably mean. *Noblesse oblige*, and I stain my own soul by one fleeting suspicion that you could be so vile as that. Though indeed you stoop low enough But you shall not win your wretched game. I will save him from you yet. Why, is he not bound fast to me by all the iron bands of honour? Has not your hypocritical virtue itself pleaded that? And did he not admit the plea, and that is how I will save him from your toils. What do you think my

love is worth, that I would—would release him from his vows to me? Vows that in your face and before the world shall be welded nine times strong before twice twenty-four hours more are gone over; riveted by that same man whose name has been dragged into this tangle of trickery. Was it not enough to cast the stigma of unfaith on me, but that it should besmirch him too? That looks like my lady's handiwork pure and simple. Nay, Heaven pardon me if I am wrong, but countless words and actions of hers point to her spiteful hatred of the manner in which he strives to serve his Master and hers. See how this Christian loves that other one. And then, am I to be constrained, by false charity, to gloss her evil over, and say she would not slander him if she could, and try to humble him in the world's sight, to gratify her own paltry malice and pamper her mean prejudices?

Oh! I see it! I see it all! In a glass darkly, very darkly, and in strange bewildering confusion the ugly shadows flit to and fro, but I see it all. I am not to be hoodwinked, and, surely as good shall one day triumph over evil, so I will trample you all under foot.

Oh, love! my love! what would my life be to me, and you not in it? A rudderless boat upon a sunless ice-cold sea, a desert of arid choking sand, with never an oasis in it. In the light of your presence the whole world shines for me, and each common trifle and incident of daily life is gilded with a glory unspeakable; but that faded, I think my heart's charity and sympathy would all die too, and it would shrivel to a veritable Timon's; but you are mine! mine! and——

“Gracious! and so here you are!” blurts out a tuneless but not unkindly voice

beside me; scattering all my own voiceless musings; and I look up and find Ursula Haverling staring down upon me with lack-lustre, but wonder-rounded eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE PLEASAUNCE.

“**W**HAT on earth are you doing here,
 Jeannette, sitting up like—like—
 Good Gracious !”

“Like a toad in a hole,” I say, jauntily,
 “because, my dear, I—can’t help it.”

But Ursula still maintains her stolid
 gravity. “They are looking for you every-
 where, don’t you know ?”

“Who are !”

“Isoline——”

“Ah, really ! How long may she have
 been doing that ?”

"Oh, ever so long. And Cousin Morton?"

"He too! Absolutely!"

"Yes," she went on, breathlessly, "and Miss Cleveland, and—and everybody."

"What a hue and cry, to be sure! And how came you, of all people, to join the pack?" I asked, with no unfeigned curiosity. "How in the world did you contrive to slip your leash?"

"Oh!" she answered, with a cunning laugh, "she's out."

"Lady Havering, do you mean?"

"Yes, and Sharples too."

"Out at this time?"

"Yes," nodded Ursula, gleefully. "Lady Havering said she'd got a little private mission of charity to perform."

"Where?"

"Oh! how do I know? But it was awfully nice, wasn't it? And directly they'd gone, I slipped out too, by the back gate of

the servants' wing. It wasn't likely I was going to stay in the place all by myself, with nothing to do but poke about from room to room, when they're like tombs, and just when there's such lots of fun going to begin."

"Fun?"

"Yes; you know, the evergreen arch is up already over the church-gate. And then—then," she added, more shyly, "I thought I'd like to see what they were doing down at your house."

"And what are they doing?"

"Nothing," she said, dismally. "There wasn't a soul about, except the cat, and she was mewling because she'd got shut out. They'd all gone off hunting after you."

"How do you know?"

"Because I met Mrs. Tugnutt coming up to the house. She fancied you must have gone into the park, or something."

"That wasn't very probable."

"No. That's what I said to myself, you know. But I didn't say so to her. Nor to Miss Cleveland neither. I met her in the churchyard. I guessed you were here, don't you see, when they said you'd gone to St. Grimwold's. I know your ways."

"Well?"

"Well, and I had a fancy for finding you myself."

"But why, child?"

"Oh! because I had something I wanted to tell you all by myself. See? It isn't anything particular; but I don't choose I should know what queer tricks they play, and you not know too. That's all," she said, doggedly.

"Well, what's the mystery?"

"Why, I was in the pleasaunce this afternoon, you see," she went on, dropping her voice, after she had glanced warily round, "in

the pleasaunce about five o'clock. I'd been dawdling about till I was quite tired, and, as I wanted something to do, I thought I'd go into the yew-arbour and have a sleep. I was just thinking, with my eyes shut fast, how lovely you'd look in that white satin dress, and the flowers and things, when all at once I heard a sort of sound like a rustling of a woman's dress. 'That's her,' I thought, opening my eyes, but not stirring an inch."

"Who, child?"

"Why, Sharples, of course, silly. She's always trailing about in Lady Havering's cast-off gowns. I know the sound of her. And, yes; there she was, creeping in under the arch in the hedge, and peeping about, sly fox of a thing, every way, with her hand under her apron, as if she'd got something hiding. She couldn't see me though, curled up in the dark behind the wooden

table. Then up she gathered her petticoats tight, and skuttled post-haste along under the hedge to the boat-house gate, and unlocked it, and stretched out her neck over the steps, and said, 'Are you there?' in a loud whisper. 'Ay! 'ere I be, missis.' It was Jem, Jeannette. You know him?"

Yes, better than I esteemed him, I knew Jem; a sly, loutish, swinish, hang-dog creature, bad enough to corrupt the whole village, as indeed he strove industriously to do, and thriving luxuriously on his reputation of a fool. Oh yes, I knew Jem.

"'Ere I be, missis,' he said, with his whine, 'and if I gets my death o' cold a-standin' half up my shins in the water—' You know how he talks, Jeannette.

"'Hush!' Sharples said, 'hold your noise; just you take and give this,' and she took a letter from under her apron and put it into his hands—'and give this in, as I told you

you was to do yesterday, at the great entrance. And this,' and then she took a second letter—'and this at Cliffe Cottage, and be quick about it. And look here, Jem,' she went on, holding up her finger at him and putting something that jingled into his hand, 'that's for doing of it. But let me hear of your telling any living man, woman, or child who give you those letters to hand in, and I'll find a way to see you clapped in St. Grimwold's jail for——'

" 'Oh! hush!' and he began to whimper, Jeannette, like a naughty child. 'Don't peach on me, missis, and I won't peach on you, by the——' "

"Never mind that, Ursula. What next?"

"No. It doesn't matter, of course. Well, then she said, 'You'd best take the boat across here; it's too far to go back by the dry bit of the moat,'—so that's how he'd crept round, you see—'and I'll keep hold

of the rope, and pull it back when you're landed.' And that's what was done, I suppose, for, after a minute or two, she came inside and locked the gate, and skimmed off as she'd come. And, when she'd gone, I thought I'd just find my way into the house again. And, as I passed the library-door, Cousin Morton called to me. He often does—for a little chat, you know. I expect he thinks I'm dull. So I am, and it's awfully good of him, isn't it? Well, this afternoon, it was a great book of beautiful engravings he had had sent down for a present for a certain lady, he said, who liked such things. We know who that is, don't we, Jeannette?"

"Well? Well?"

"Well, while I was looking, in came Lady Havering, and put a letter into Morton's hand. 'I thought the five o'clock postman had been,' he said, as he took it.

“ ‘It’s not a post-letter,’ she answered. ‘Some person brought it to the great door, just as I was passing across the hall,’—of course she was, you know, she took care to be—‘and, as Perkins had gone to his tea, I took it.’

“ ‘What sort of a person?’ he asked.

“ ‘Really,’ she said, ‘I can’t tell you.’—Such a wicked story, Jeannette; as if she didn’t know as well as you and I do.—‘I never look at such people. A man, I fancy it was. He said there was no answer, and went away.’ And then she went out too, and told me to come, and not stay there worrying Morton; but I chose to stop a minute or two, pretending to look at the pictures, but really I was watching his face while he read his letter, and there came ever such a queer, puzzled look into his eyes. Then he read it again, and then he put it in his pocket, and—that’s all I know,

Jeannette. Can you imagine what it was about? Wouldn't you give your ears to know? I would."

"Perhaps it—was nothing particular."

"How you say that. Are you ill? or hurt?"

"Yes, hurt—horribly," I groaned.

"And that's why you've sat yourself down in this funny place. What's the matter, dear?" and, with a tenderness I could not have imagined her capable of, she stooped down beside me.

"Ah! only that I've twisted my foot somehow, like the clumsy thing that I am, and just sat down here, because—I couldn't help myself. That's all the mystery, Ursula."

"Can't you stir a bit?" she asked.

"With the loan of an arm perhaps I could. But you daren't stay to lend me yours. You'll be missed——"

"I don't care if I am," she said, dogged-

ly. "I didn't come here to do any harm, and Havering Court is not to be my prison, and—no, not if she beats me for it—I'm not going to leave you here all alone. Come, do get up now."

"I can't stay here all night certainly," I said, thus admonished, "can I, besides—Ursula, listen now. You can keep a secret, can't you?"

"Of course I can, if I choose," she said, with swelling dignity.

"And you will choose, won't you, if I ask you to keep it for me—and for Sir Morton too. You like him, don't you?"

"Yes, and you too. What is it?"

"I don't want you to tell him or a creature that you found me down here."

"Why not?"

"Well, Havering's such a chattering place, and Lady Havering is so—so——"

"Yes, yes, she is, isn't she?"

"Yes, and she might wonder what I— what I was doing here all alone, don't you know, so late, and worry Sir Morton about it."

"It isn't her business," grunted Ursula.

"My dear, that argument's worse than useless. But of course," I continued, with an air of supreme indifference, "if you don't choose to comply with my request, it's not of the least—it does not matter much; only when you say where you found me, you'll tell where you've been yourself, necessarily, won't you?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRIEST'S TOWER.

"I NEVER thought of that," she said, when at last she found the breath to respond, of which my brilliant coup seemed temporarily to have deprived her.

"And she's forbidden you to come here, hasn't she?" I went on, briskly following up my advantage.

"Oh, yes, yes."

"And yet here you are, at nine o'clock at night."

"Oh, Jeannette! But you'll never tell of me. You'd never be so mean as that."

"Of course I will not," I replied, magnanimously."

"But I won't leave you here if she kills me for it! Oh, what shall we do? What shall we do?" she said, clasping her hands despairingly.

"Make the best of a bad business, and give me your arm, Ursula, for a crutch up to the road, and then, why, you can say you found me slipped——"

"Yes, yes, over one of the great fallen lumps of rock. Oh! that'll do beautifully. Come along," and, with a cleared face, she began to help me up.

"I don't like lies," I went on, as I struggled to my feet, and linked my arm in hers, "but in this case ——"

"It doesn't matter a bit telling them to her. She tells no end of them whenever she wants."

Putting off any combating of the ethical

untenability of her argument till a more convenient season—for whether I or my *deus ex machina* were the more anxious to be out of the wood, is hard to say—I contrived with her assistance to attain the high road.

“Has it hurt so very much?” she asked, when I leaned against the fence for a moment to get breath.

“I have managed it better than I expected, at all events,” I gasped, “there certainly is nothing like facing a difficulty. And I can’t have broken any bones, as I was stupid enough to think I might. Let’s get on, dear.”

And so, with asinine patience—only that comparison is worthy to convey any conception of her goodness—Ursula helped me along the road, which lay gleaming like a plateau of smoothest snow in the light of the moon.

“I do hope Lady Havering won’t be vexed with you,” I said.

"Oh! but she will. I don't care, though, a bit."

"Don't keep saying that," I remonstrated.
"Don't care, you know, came to a bad end."

"That would only be the same as I began. I shall never be different," she whimpered, "and I do wish I was dead. I'm no use, and——"

"Why, you are of the greatest! What should I do without you now, for example?" I said, with an effort at cheeriness.

The sullen brow cleared strangely as I spoke.

"You're always nice to me," she said.
"I should like to live with you if Lady Havering were to turn me out."

"What a notion!"

"Or die, or something."

"My dear, what fancies!"

"Jolly ones."

"For shame!"

"I do wish she would—turn me out, you know. If she ever does, may I come and live with you and him? May I, Jeannette? May I?" and there was a gleam of absolute pleasure in her eyes. "I'm not nice—I know that; and, if you were going to live in some little hole of a place, I wouldn't ask you such a thing; but Havering Court is such a wilderness of a house, you'd hardly know I was in it. You wouldn't really. And if you said yes, I'm sure Morton would. He thinks you're everybody; and so you are. Would you say yes? Would you?"

"Dear child," I answered, evasively, "all that is building such castles in the air."

"Then you wouldn't?" and her face fell.

"Indeed I don't say that; I——How odd the top of the tower—the priest's tower—looks! Doesn't it?" I said, as we turned the angle of the road, and came in full view

of the ruins. "Or is it some dark shade?"

"No," said Ursula, following the direction of my gaze. "It's that great cracked piece fallen in!"

Sure enough! Sharp and clear, the foundations of the piece of ancient masonry stood out, firm and massive as ever, but the old familiar outline of its ruined summit, softened by the thick growth of ivy, one of my childhood's earliest memories, was gone. To think that afternoon I had looked my last on it! Gone! and against the masses of silver-gilded cloud high above, frowned a huge, black, jagged chasm, zig-zagging half-way down to the base.

"He said it would," murmured Ursula, at last, out of the silence of the strange awe transfixing us. "Well, it was immensely old, and no sort of good," she went on, consolingly. "It's ever so much better down, if it meant to come."

"Well, perhaps," I sighingly assented, "it would have been frightful if it had happened in the daytime, and any of those tiresome children had happened to be about. And they do go there, in spite of the board. I've caught them at it. Hark! Didn't you hear something?"

"No! what?" cried Ursula, turning and clinging to me in trembling terror. "What was it like?"

"A sort of—a groan. Hush! hush! Listen!"

"Not now, Jeannette. It couldn't be. Come, do come along."

But I held her fast and listened. No, not a sound besides the loud rushing of the weir, always so distinctly audible at this point, and an unusually loud hooting and screeching overhead, as though the owls and nightbirds who specially affected the ruins, had been vastly disturbed and affronted at

what had occurred in their midst. Delenda est Carthago ! But besides, the very silence of death reigned.

"Forwards ! then, Ursula," I said, and we marched on, as fast as circumstances permitted.

"It's the sign," said Ursula, presently, in a sepulchral voice.

"The sign ?" I echoed, "sign of what ?"

"Of death, you know, or something dreadful to Havering. Don't you know what they say——"

"Of course I do," I sharply interrupted. "I know they talk an infinity of nonsense about the whole place. Let's get on, child."

When at last we reached the park gates, I parted company with Ursula, not so much as accepting her aid up the garden path.

"I can manage quite well alone, dear, now. It isn't a quarter so bad as I fancied, or I couldn't have walked so far as I have.

Do get home, dear child, for my sake, if you don't care for your own."

And then she consented to go, and I entered the house by the open window. Althea was alone, in the dining-room half dismantled, and all in confusion in anticipation of the next day's festive arrangements. She had her bonnet on, and her shawl was thrown carelessly on the table as if she had just come in.

"Have you been wondering what has become of me?" I asked, jauntily, as I entered, and sank down upon the sofa.

"My dear," she cried, with a pleasurable start, "wonder is not quite the word. We've been in a terrible fright about you. What has been the matter? How pale you are! What in the world has happened?"

"N—nothing particular. I slipped over a stone, and twisted my foot a little,

and had to sit down for a bit by the road."

"For a bit! But, my dear, it's past nine."

"So late? Well, I don't know how I should have got home at all, if Ursula Haverling hadn't helped me."

"She found you then?"

"Yes."

"Whereabouts?"

"Where I fell, of course. I couldn't stir for ever so long."

"Ah!" returned Althea, "now that's curious. Two hours ago I met her poking about in the churchyard, and I told her then of your disappearance."

"So she said."

"And she has been your good Samaritan. But let me take your boot off, and see what mischief's been done."

"Oh! it's nothing."

"I'm best judge of that," she replied, pursing her lips, and not a syllable more was to be extracted from them, till she had doctored the injured part with all sorts of cool, sweet-scented lotions.

"You're as skilful as Sir James himself, Althea," I said.

"I haven't lived with him all these twenty years with my eyes shut, I hope, my dear," she answered, with a little smile of gratified pride, "and if I can prevent it, we won't have a lame bride on Thursday morning. How was it you didn't meet Morton on the road. He's gone off in a fine quandary to look for you."

"I saw nothing of him there. Has Lina gone with him?"

"No, she's somewhere close by, looking about too. She couldn't rest indoors. She's been dreadfully anxious."

"What nonsensical——"

"No; not at all. Don't be angry with her, Jeannette. I'm convinced you'd have been the first to make a hue and cry if she'd disappeared in such a queer, unaccountable fashion all at once. And to think you've had all the plague of it for nothing too, after all!"

"Oh no, I—that is of no consequence."

"Mrs. Tugnutt's cap came not half an hour after you'd started, along with a box of things ordered from the great house. I expect, you see, it's been all Milligan's work to get finished off, and Lady Havering's things were behind time too, it appears, for Mrs. Sharples was here——"

"What time?"

"Just as the man came. About half-past four."

"What for?"

"My dear, I'm going to tell you. She came to ask, she said, if any parcel from

Milligan's had been left here by mistake."

"As if that was likely!"

"Well, that's what she said—'as nothing had come to Havering Court, as promised.' And fortunately—though I don't fancy the man thought it so fortunate—she met him, as I tell you, at the door-step there. You never heard such a rating as she gave him. My dear, what a tongue!—and he didn't like it at all. He went off mumbling some shockingly bad words or other, I know they were, though I can't swear to exactly what, and really, you know, she——"

"And you told her I had gone to St. Grimwold's?"

"No, we didn't. But she heard it, because Mrs. Tugnutt told the man while she was standing by."

"You are sure she heard?"

Althea smiled.

"If she has any ears, she couldn't have

helped it, for Dolly was going on at a great rate, though, when Mrs. Sharples took her turn at the poor fellow, Dolly's scolding sounded in comparison, like the dropping of pearls to the cracking of rifle-bullets. Of course she heard, because she thought proper to give her opinion on the matter, and said it wasn't every lady in your situation would condescend to go all that distance after a poor servant's cap. I can tell you, Dolly watched her as she went away with anything but looks of admiration, and then she turned to me and said, 'It's no use, Miss Cleveland, I never can abide that woman,' and, Jeannette, I couldn't say that I could. I do trust I'm not prejudiced, but——"

"And Sir Morton. What time did you say he started for St. Grimwold's?"

"My dear, I didn't notice. I was thinking so much about you, and what might have happened to you. He just came up

the garden with your sister, and then, finding you had not come in, started off directly. But here's Isoline, she'll tell you all about it. The runaway's come back, my dear," she said, addressing Isoline as she entered.

"Jeannette!" cried Lina, "how could you put us all in such a fright? What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Don't worry her just yet," pleaded the charitable Althea. "She slipped down and hurt her ankle."

"Oh! you poor dear!" and Lina flew to my side, and laid her hand upon my bared foot. Her light, cool touch sent a pang of absolute fury through my whole frame.

"Don't touch me! Keep off!" I shrieked.

"Is it so bad as that?" she asked, shrinking back, but looking into my face with a soft, sweet compassion, which added fuel to my frenzy. "Is it so bad as that, Netta dear?"

"Where is Sir Morton?" was all my answer.

"Gone to St. Grimwold's. He was so anxious about you, and very naturally, too, when——"

"Oh, quite so," I sneered. "Most natural, wasn't it? But all the same it was a pity he gave himself so much trouble."

"Trouble?" she repeated, looking with a puzzled air into my face. "He did not think it that for you, Netta, any more than you thought so, when he was once upon a time in such a plight as you are now. He would be an ungrateful creature if he was," she went on, with a little laugh.

"Gratitude!—gratitude! Why is that cant to be eternally dinned into my ears? Good heavens!"

"I am afraid it pains you very much," she said.

"What does?" I savagely demanded.

"Why, your foot."

"Oh, my foot is nothing—it will be well to-morrow."

"I'm sure I hope so, when one thinks what is going to be on Thursday morning."

"Ah!" returned I, "it would be such an irreparable misfortune, wouldn't it, if that had to be put off?"

She made no answer.

"Wouldn't it?" I sulkily insisted.

"Don't talk of such a thing," she said then. "It mustn't be put off."

"Oh, really! And why not, Madam Sphinx?"

"Jeannette," she answered, "whatever happens——"

"What is likely to happen?" I sharply interrupted.

"Why, nothing that I can foresee."

"Ah! but if the unforeseen occurs, what then? I interrupted you—what then?"

"Why, then," she said, with a faint, amused smile, "we must just make 'honey-pots' of you, and carry you to the altar, or what do you say to a white satin palanquin? But go you must—of course you must."

"Is it such a matter of life and death as all that—to you?" I asked, curiously.

"Well," she replied, "in a way it is, Netta, for I—you see, I can't stay here. I—want to get away again, and yet first I—should like to see you his wife."

"Want to get away again, and but just come!"

"I thought your leave of absence was for a month," mildly put in Althea, looking at her through her spectacles.

Isoline crimsoned, grew pale as death, and then flushed deeper than before.

"So it is," she faltered; "but I—you see, I don't feel at home here, somehow. German ways are so different, and I am so

tude at Althea's beaming, triumphant face, then her eyelids dropped again, and she coloured painfully.

"Absurd?" went on Althea, in brisk tones. "No, not at all. I have met dozens of Germans in my time, and I assure you that two or three of them have been really quite well-bred, intelligent persons. Don't blush, my dear; of course we can't expect you to own any such soft little impeachments, but che sarà sarà, and, in the meantime, Jeannette is glad, though she does frown and bite her handsome lips, pretending to be vexed because there's a chance of your being as happy as she is one of these days. Does he wear spectacles my dear?"

Lina laughed, and shook her head in odd bewilderment.

"Most Germans do," continued Althea, reflectively. "Well, dear child, I can only say, if you ask my opinion, make haste back,

and see after this lost heart. If a man's worth two straws—and I'm sure if he wasn't, you wouldn't like him—one oughtn't to trifle with him. Ought one, Jeanette?"

"Isoline knows best," I answered, icily.
"She is not inexperienced."

"Now that is not generous of you," rejoined Althea. "Bygones are bygones, and ought never to be recalled."

"Precisely," acquiesced I, glancing at Lina. "When you and Morton parted to-night, Isoline,"—she started, and every tinge of colour faded from her face—"what time was it?"

"A quarter to nine, or a little more, wasn't it," said Althea.

"Oh! yes," replied Lina, recovering herself.

"He couldn't possibly be back for another hour," went on Althea, "unless he chances to hear tidings of you before he

gets to St. Grimwold's. And I do hope—
Hush! That is his step."

"I knew you were safe home, Jeannette," he said, as he entered, and seated himself near me, with a grave, pre-occupied air. "I have just seen Ursula, and she told me, and all about your accident, too. I hope it is not very bad?"

"Thank you," I replied, with assumed carelessness, "it is nothing worth speaking of. Did you find Ursula up at the Court?"

"Yes," he replied, still speaking like a man in a dream.

"And Lady Havering, has she—— Morton, what a state you are in!" I cried, for my eyes, which were keenly watching him, had detected, in the dim lamplight, marks of mud, and faint patches of chalky stains upon his coat. "And your hands, too, there is blood upon them! And here on your wristband! Oh! Morton——"

"Something has happened," he said.

"To whom ? To whom ? Oh!——"

"To Lady Havering. The top of the Priest's Tower has fallen in to-night, and it fell upon her, and almost crushed her to death."

"But she is not dead?" we cried, in a breath.

"No, she is breathing. Verity is with her; but of course he can't tell the extent of her injuries. They are very bad; though her head escaped with only a deep cut near the temple. Half an inch nearer must have killed her on the spot."

"What on earth," ejaculated Althea, "was she doing in the Priest's Tower at such a time of night?"

CHAPTER IX.

"IT MUSTN'T BE PUT OFF."

"IT was a fortunate coincidence," continued Morton, as if he had not so much as heard Althea's remark, "that I was going that way. I heard a groaning just as I reached the angle of the road."

"I fancied I did," said I.

"It was too continuous for fancy when I heard it. And I turned off across the grass, through the ruins, in the direction of the sounds, and there she lay."

"All alone, poor creature?" demanded Althea.

"No ; worse than that. With Sharples standing beside her like a block of stone, staring at her, without so much as attempting to lift a single flint of the awful weight."

"What could they be doing there?"

"My dear Althea, how should I know? It wasn't a time for details, when she lay all—never mind. I sent off Sharples to Dibbins's cottage for assistance, and to have Verity summoned ; and, while she was gone, I did what I could. They soon came with a long sheep's-hurdle, and we carried her as gently as we were able to the cottage, and laid her upon the bed in the one little bed-room, and there she lies—and I can tell you no more. I must go back to see what has been done," and he rose. "I am glad to think your brother will be here in the morning," he said, turning to Althea. "By-the-by, can you send Reuben to meet him at the station, Jeannette? It is a

pleasure I was promising myself; but now—it will not be possible. I will write a note explaining why,” he added, drawing the inkstand towards him, and hastily scribbling a few lines, “and Tugnutt can give it him.”

“Poor lady!” said Althea. “Couldn’t one of us go back with you to help, if Sharples is such a dunderhead——”

“Oh! I sent her home before we got to the cottage, for she set up such howls, at regular intervals of two minutes, that it was unendurable. So that there is only Dibbins’s wife with my aunt, and she’s an excellent, willing creature enough, but not too brilliant. You would be useful, if you would come, Althea.”

And, as Miss Cleveland tied her bonnet-strings, he added, glancing at Lina and me,

“In any case, I would not have asked you to come. I know how you would have

volunteered, and what magic hands yours are in a trouble like this ; but"—he paused and coloured a little—"any excitement——"

"We know that Althea is best," I said. "What a frightful accident! Do you think she will die?" I continued, while Althea went up to her room, in search of one or two articles of her pharmacopœia, which, as she said, "might be useful."

"I can tell you that no more than I can guess what took her to the place," he replied. "Dear child," he went on, coming beside me and taking my hand, "what a dreary wedding-day for you!"

"There can be no thought of that at all now," I said, withdrawing my fingers, dead cold for all the heat of the night.

"Why not?"

"With death hovering over us like this?"

"It may be days, weeks before it strikes," he urged, "years even—though she will never be able to walk a step again. Are you ready, Althea? Come then. I have brought the chaise to take us, and if Tugnutt can come too, he might drive it back, and put it up in your stable, if you will accommodate Sir Peter, Jeannette?"

"Yes. That will do very well," said Althea. "And he can fetch James in the morning. I'm ready, Morton."

And they hurried away.

"What could she be doing in the tower?" said Lina, as the sound of the departing wheels died in the distance.

"How surprised you do seem to be at that!" I said, petulantly.

"And are not you?" she asked, with rounded eyes.

"No."

"But——"

"Nothing surprises me. If anybody came to me and said that heaven's own angels had been found to be all as black-hearted as pitch, and as treacherous as snakes, I should believe them. What are you staring at? Because I'm going to bed? Well, I suppose, if we stay up all night, we shan't alter things."

"Alter things?" she murmured.

"Mend that miserable woman's broken bones, you moonstruck little thing. Talking of moons, was ever such a one as this has been to-night? Charming, wasn't it?"

"Oh, Netta!" she said, reproachfully.

"Thanks! Don't touch me," I said, waving her off as she came near. "Don't touch me—do you hear? These stupid—"

wooden—heartless old chairs and tables are better than all your help.”

And, with not so much as a good night to fling at her, I left her alone.

CHAPTER X.

SIR JAMES COMES TO HAVERING.

AN early morning train was to bring Sir James Cleveland to St. Grimwold's. He was, of course, to be a guest at Havering Court ; and had promised himself a two days' holiday "in honour," as he had written to Morton, of "the happy occasion."

Venturing to interfere with Morton's directions so far as myself to drive to St. Grimwold's, instead of despatching Reuben to meet Sir James, I started, in order to save time, by the upper road. Sir Peter

and I always understood one another admirably; and with a touch of my whip that disarranged the hairs of his rather superabundantly well-covered flanks about as much as the alighting of a fly upon them, he started off at a pace that promised not to slacken for the entire length of the level open road. About half a mile, however, after getting clear of Havering, I pulled him up in his wild career, till he reared again—smitten by a sudden thrill of horror lest I had driven over some object bearing a remote resemblance to the human form divine, stretched half across the road. Whether asleep, or otherwise incapable, it was not possible to tell, until the creature slowly got upon his feet, and, with his head sunken so low upon his breast that I could not see his face, half achieved his perpendicular, and then, with a muttered oath, stumbled to the ground again, and lay there sprawling his

length. With a renewed effort, however, that lodged him on the edge of the footpath, he lifted his head, and revealed the ill-favoured and bloated countenance of Jem.

Then he proceeded to anathematise me and Sir Peter in the full force of his vernacular, until gradually some dim recognition of me seemed to dawn upon him, and he fell from cursing to begging, in an idiotic whine, declaring that not a morsel of food had passed his lips for a whole day.

"Then you've made up for it in drink. Where did you get the money to pay for that?" I inquired, knowing very well that the "Green Dragon" had long since declined the privilege of supplying him on credit.

"'Twas honest come by," he growled. "Sh—Sh—she give it me. A o—ole arf crown, but it's—all gone," and thrusting his

hands into his pockets, he ruefully turned them inside out, "every brass farden o't!"

"Sh—Sh—," I said, mimicking him. "Do you mean Mrs. Sharples, up at Havering Court, gave it you?"

"Ah, that be 'er," he answered, blinking his bloodshot eyes in hazy astonishment up at me. "I arned it off her, for a little job as she axed me to do for her."

"Of course you did it?" I said, carelessly flicking the flies from Sir Peter's ears.

"Well," he said, opening his grimy palm, and looking at a soiled and crumpled piece of note-paper lying in it, with a sort of vague compunction, "'tain't vinished of, zo to speak. I left the one she give me virst, in at the big 'all door all roight. My lady, she tooked it in 'erself. And then this 'ere,"—and again he contemplated the scrip—"this 'ere were for your 'ouse."

"Well?"

“But just as I was a turnin’ in at the gate, who should come along but Mat and Jan ; goin’ a harvestin’ they was, over to t’other side o’ St. Grimwold’s way, and, zays they, they sez, ‘Dang the letter, mate, that’ll bide, coom and ’ave a drink,’ an’ I goed, and we az our arf pint down to the ‘Green Dragon.’ And when we cooms out again—I must ha’ coomed out, marnt I?” he interrupted himself, scratching his head, and looking round.

“Apparently,” I answered.

“Ay, and I must ha’ coomed pairtways wi’ ’em, eh? And then—then——”

“Tumbled down in this disgraceful manner, and neglected your commission. How do you know that note isn’t of the greatest consequence? Give it to me at once,” and I held out my hand.

“No,” he said, shaking his head with tipsy gravity, and getting to his feet again, but oscillating perilously on those founda-

tions. "She zaid 'twas for t'other one. She az 'as bin away to furrin parts."

"My sister."

"Ay, 'er, and that mum waz the word, an' I waz to give it into no 'ands but her'n."

"And what," said I, sternly, "if I tell her of your negligence?"

He turned on me with uplifted, threatening hand, but the effort overbalanced him, and he tripped, and once more fell heavily as a log. Then, twisting his head round, he looked up at me with such livid, abject terror in his face that some sense of loathing compassion seized me.

"It won't need my telling," I went on, "if you're going to sit here all day. You'll be found out, of course."

"But I an't a-goin' to zit 'ere," and once again he scrambled to his feet, and set his face straight for St. Grimwold's. "I'm goin' to give it in at wunst."

"That's not the way to Havering."

The dazed wretch clasped his hand to his head, gazed helplessly all round, and then, without another word, placed the bit of paper in my hand.

"You won't tell on me, miss," he yelped out, "and go gettin' of a poor——"

"Not if you'll go home and wash your face, and see if you can get some honest work to do, and leave the 'Green Dragon' alone," I said, tightening my reins.

His face cleared.

"I'll never zet foot inside the pladce this zide o' Christmas, z'help me——"

Distance saved my ears the rest. False,—
"false as dicer's oaths," did Shakespeare say? He could as reasonably have written "drunkards." This ignorant village outcast was not a doit worse or better than the million other of the drink fiend's victims. Fools all of them, from my lord with his delicate, snow-

white, fingers tremulously toying with the fragile, diamond-clear goblet of Moët, to clods like these, clutching their pewter pint pots, and boozing away their wits in their clumsy depths. Fools, fools unstable, untrustworthy as a rotten boat. Where had been Mrs. Abigail's wits that she had employed such an ambassador as this for her secret mission? Clearly time had pressed with her—that could be the only solving of the riddle. There had been no leisure to look round and select a more dependable Mercury. Neither, even if there had been, was everybody ready to do her dirty work for her. Havering was not fond of Mrs. Sharples.

I needed no reading of that blurred scrawl, whose half-obliterated superscription just allowed of its witnessing that it was intended for Miss Isoline Latour, to tell me the nature of its contents, and I should have made no scruple of breaking the

smudge of a seal, even if it had been intact, which, in consequence of its rough usage, it no longer was. With some difficulty, I gathered the sense of the three or four lines, which were evidently in a disguised hand, full of vile twists and contortions, and ill-spelt. The composition, however, argued the assistance of more educated brains.

"If you want to save sertiin peeple from a grate deal of misery, be in St. Grimwold's wood to-night at eight o'clock. Yure well-wisher."

That, in its original completeness, was all, but it sufficed to clear the haunting suspicion that that meeting in the wood had, after all, been a rendezvous, and not purely accidental—at least, that duplicity could not be laid to Lina's charge, nor to his.

A natural chain of events, so far as she

was concerned, had brought about what these two women had been torturing their wits to effect. And, determined that Lina should never so much as know of the decoy that had been set for her, I tore the scrip into a hundred shreds, and, sending them flying over the breezy down to right and left of me, drove on with my heart lightened by a hair's breadth of its load of misery ; just reaching the station in time to see the express steam up to the platform, and to accost Sir James Cleveland as he alighted and looked round for Morton.

"He was unable to come himself, Sir James," I said, in reply to his glance of inquiry, as I conducted him to the chaise, and placed Morton's note in his hand. "This will explain what has happened. Your sister is with Lady Havering," I continued, when he had read it through.

"Good !" he said.

"And Sir Morton desired me to ask you if, when you have rested, you will go to the cottage where they have carried Lady Havering."

"I will go at once, my dear," he said. "Where is the house?"

"On the way to Havering. There is the Priest's Tower, where the accident occurred," I said, pointing to it with my whip, as we came in distant sight of the ruins, and shivering as I looked at the great ivy trails tossing in the wind about the yawning chasm.

"Was there any idea of its being unsafe?" asked Sir James, as he fixed his double-eyeglass, and contemplated it with curious interest.

"There had been a board up for months past to warn people from going there, but it hardly served its end as it ought. Everybody seemed to think it would last for ever—on the principle, I suppose, of 'the crack-

ed jug that lasts the longest' theory. And the boys of the place were no doubt playing hide and seek in it this time yesterday."

"Ay, of course; lads will be lads, and must take the consequences," replied Sir James. "But, Lady Havering is not exactly a—ahem——Wasn't it rather a singular place for her to be in? at such a time too!"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Had she any purpose in going there, do you suppose—Any purpose?"

"We have lived within a stone's throw of each other for a good many years, Sir James," I said, "but I know as little of Lady Havering and her ways as she does of mine—less, I fancy. Here is the cottage."

And I pulled up on the wide sward opposite. He descended, and, softly lifting the latch of the little white wooden wicket, passed up the narrow path, fringed with

southernwood and thrift, and knocked gently at the door. It was noiselessly opened by some invisible hand, and then closed again immediately.

In compliance with Sir Peter's vigorous intimation that he wished to acquaint himself with the flavour of the delightful grass within two feet of his nose, I slackened my reins, and fell to a thoughtful survey of the little cottage with its gable-ended, thatched roof, lying golden-yellow in the full mid-day sunlight against the chalky cliffs; and its one tiny latticed window with a great bow-pot of rather faded blossoms adorning its broad, inner ledge so as entirely to screen the room's interior.

The little garden was ablaze with the luxuriance of late summer flowers, whose sweet scents came wafted to me on the breath of the light breeze playing through the trees its accompaniment to the sing-

ing of the birds, while the ceaseless crop, crop of Sir Peter's jaws, and the weak clucking of some young fowls still under maternal surveillance, made the silence eloquent of the peace and content that seemed to reign undisturbed. The cat of the little domain, in nowise put about by Sir James's gentle foot, lay on the door-stone, blinking her sleepy eyes up at the insects buzzing past her in the moted haze, and bestowing an occasional spasmodical polish upon her broad shirt-front, so dazzlingly white that the proceeding must have been a complete work of supererogation.

Who would have dreamed that suffering, and death itself, perhaps, lurked within those four walls?

For some time I sat waiting on, until some one should come out and speak to me. It was not long before the door opened again, and Morton, bending his tall

figure under it, came down to the chaise.

"She has just become conscious," he replied to my face's mute inquiry, "and has spoken a few words; but I can hardly conceive her to be in her right mind. She has asked for Swithin Glastonbury."

"Swithin Glastonbury!" I echoed, in amazement. "Impossible! You must have mistaken her."

"I thought so; and under the impression that she desired to see some clergyman, and that her poor brain was confusing names, I mentioned the vicar, but she waved her hand impatiently, and repeated Glastonbury's name. Have you time to turn round again and fetch him, Jeannette, or shall I?"

"Of course I have," I said, pulling up Sir Peter's head with a jerk that must have made him boil with indignation, and turning it straight round for the town.

"You are in a great hurry," he said, with

the faintest suspicion of a smile on his face, but it was one which had no pleasure in it.

"I suppose there never was greater need to be," I returned.

"It is impossible to tell," he answered. "Cleveland endorses what Dr. Verity said, that she may linger for weeks, years even, but it is hardly to be hoped, for she will be so awfully maimed at best."

"But if her mind——"

"It might go again at any moment."

"All the more reason for me to make haste."

"Do. Yes. You always are a practical little woman. Shall I come with you?"

"As you think best."

"On second thoughts, no, then. It is better not; I might be wanted, you see."

"Then pray stay where you are," and with a lash which poor Sir Peter resented with a swish of his tail, and a general hint

that any repetition of the affront would land me somewhere up the first bank, I dashed on to St. Grimwold's.

CHAPTER XI.

“KEEP TRYST.”

FORTUNATELY, Mr. Glastonbury was at home, and, on being informed of my errand, he jumped in beside me, and once again the chaise was bowling along the road to the cottage.

He had already heard of the catastrophe ; and I was simply able to add the few words of intelligence which I had gathered from Morton.

“It’s a curious request, don’t you think?” I ventured to say. “I hardly fancied that you were—one of her favourites. Did you?”

"I certainly could not flatter myself that I was," he replied ; " but I can only do my duty, and obey, Miss Latour. This is a cruel blow to happen just now," he went on.

" Just now ?"

"I am thinking of what is to be to-morrow," he said, setting his lips, and looking straight between Sir Peter's ears.

"What was to have been, you mean," corrected I. "It will be deferred now, of course."

"Does Sir Morton say so?" he asked, turning on me.

"I say so, Mr. Glastonbury."

He bowed, and not another word was spoken between us until I drew up a little short of the cottage, where Althea Cleveland was standing, with her handkerchief tied over her head, on the watch for us.

"How is she now?" I hurriedly asked.

"Just the same. Incessantly asking for

Mr. Glastonbury. Will you step in at once?" she said to him. "Going home directly, Jeannette?"

"I can't be of any use, can I?"

"Not here, my dear Miss Latour," said Dr. Verity, joining us; "but you can carry me home with you, if you don't mind," and he placed himself beside me, "and as quick as you please; for I'm due hours ago in Havering. There are other sick people want attending to besides her ladyship. Good heavens! Miss Latour, can you guess what the woman wanted, prowling about in that place at such a time?"

"Lady Havering, you mean?"

"Yes, Lady Havering."

"Oh! because Sharples was there too, you know," I said.

"Of course she was. Sharples is her familiar spirit. What mischief were they both up to?"

"I wonder how many times," said I, irritably, "I have heard that question set up since last night. How on earth should I know, Dr. Verity?"

"You've got more wits than some people."

"But how——"

"Oh! well, if you don't know, you don't. It's not of much consequence. The mischief's done. It might have been worse."

"I'm glad you think so."

"Yes, I do. Supposing, for instance, it had killed some dear naughty mother's darling of a child—that would have been worse, I suppose, wouldn't it?"

"Oh! I see. Yes, perhaps——"

"It would. What a charming woman Miss Cleveland is. If I hadn't Mrs. Verity and seven chicks dependent on my exertions, upon my word I don't know what mightn't have happened to my heart

walked meditatively into the house. Isoline, arguing from there being no signs of Scamp about the place, I concluded was out. Very fair and fresh the old house looked in its bridal attire, only lacking a few touches to be quite ready for next morning. In the dining-room I came upon Dolly, arranging her pride of prides, half a dozen quaint old massive silver salt-cellars—a wedding gift to our great-great-great-grandmother from Louis the Well-beloved himself—among the glittering glass.

“And how’s her la’ship now?” asked Dolly, with one eye on the table.

“She is conscious,” I answered.

“That’s well,” she said, briskly, pulling smooth a ruck in the gleaming damask table-cloth. “I sent over the salt just now, you see, Miss Netta dear, and I was just a bit afraid lest—but there, I did throw a grain or two over my shoulder, to be sure.

And so 'tis all right then, is it, and my lady went cryin' out more than she was hurt!" and Dolly drew back a pace or two to survey the effect of her labours.

"By no means," I said. "It's an awfully serious accident; and it's all very pretty, Dolly dear, this, you know," I went on, putting an arm round her neck, and pointing to the table, "but——"

"Tan't half what should be, for the likes o' you," she rejoined, with a little gleam of prideful satisfaction; "though I do think, if the dear dead master and missis could see it, they'd say, 'You've done your best, Dorothea Tugnutt.'"

"Perhaps they do see it—who knows, dear?—but——"

"Ay," she said, with an April smile, "who knows?"

"But look here, Dolly, it's all so—I can't bear to think how it's all so wasted,

you know, this trouble you've been taking, because—of course, it isn't possible there should be any thought of my being married to-morrow now—don't you see?"

"Not—be—married!" cried Dolly, turning on me aghast.

"Not to-morrow. It wouldn't be decent, would it?"

"What call have you to mind about being decent, I'd like to know?" irefully cried she. "Her la'ship's behaved herself none so wonderful decent to you an' Miss Isoline all these years—no offence to Sir Morton, bless his kind heart, and his handsome face, too. No, no, indeed, an' what's more, he's o' my side, I'll wager. He hasn't e'er a thought o' puttin' it off, be you sure. He hasn't spoke of it to you, has he now? Speak fair to't, Miss Netta," she challenged. "Has he now?"

"He hasn't had an opportunity."

“He’d ha’ found that, if he’d wanted. No, no, now. I tell ye, Miss Netta, there mustn’t be any such sort o’ cryin’ off. Of course,” went on Dolly, qualifyingly, “if half the county had been a-comin’, as it ought to—only you’re that masterful when you do get a fancy into your head, Miss Netta, and wouldn’t have it so—there might ha’ been another side to the story; but just the vicar and his good lady, and Dr. Verity an’ his, and Miss Althea and Sir James, and Mr. Glas’nbury and that there Miss Haver-ing, all as sober folks as judges ’selves. No; you’ve no right to turn skittish like that. An’ Sir James a’ come down playin’ truant from his sick-folk up in London, all o’ purpose, and Miss Lina there, in as much of a hurry to be off again as if ropes was pulling of her. I s’pose you wouldn’t like her not to see you safe married, after all the plague and worrit

there's been to suit yourselves right, and poor Sir Morton—— There he is! Now, then," and Dolly drew the open window further back to admit him, "he'll speak for himself."

"Did I hear my name?" he said, looking from me to her, as he entered.

"Yes, you did, Sir Morton," she replied, sturdily. "Here's Miss Netta a-talkin' of—"

"Hush!"

"I won't hush then,—a-talkin' of not bein' married to-morrow, all along of what's happened to her la'ship, Sir Morton. And she won't listen to a word o' what I've got to say about her foolishness—not a word; but there, here you are, Sir Morton, an' I'll leave you to—" and Dolly flounced out, slamming the door on her final remarks, and herself.

"Netta," he said, taking my hand, "that is exactly what I've come about. I under-

stand all your thoughts—don't shake your head—and I know, before you can say them, all your arguments against things going on to-morrow as they were intended. But there must be no change, dear.”

“What—will—the world say?” I faltered, making my stalking-horse of the old inane argument.

“I can't guess at all,” shrugged he, with a faint smile. “And I care less, as you do, Jeannette.”

“But if she should die between this and to-morrow?”

“No. Cleveland assured me, as I left the cottage not an hour ago, that that was not in the least probable. And, even if it came to be so bad as that, still, child, you and I must be made man and wife to-morrow.”

“Sir Morton!” I cried, “are you in your senses?”

“So entirely in them, Jeannette, that that is why I speak as I do. It is a conclusion I have arrived at in the small hours, sitting alone there in the cottage, when I could not have slept even if I had dared. They gave me ample leisure, you see, to take a calm, dispassionate, un-romantic view of it all. And I say now, that what happened last night—— What is the matter?”

“What should be? Go on; you say——”

“That what happened last night ought not, and shall not, delay our marriage.”

“Shall not?” I echoed, defiantly.

“Not if you love me, Jeannette.”

Heaven help me! I looked into the face, haggard and pale with stress of sleeplessness, and of how much besides, and I forgot Lina's very existence; forgot that, save our two selves, the world held aught, and yet I stifled down the impulse that

would have sent me clinging to his breast, and said coldly,

"This is no time for merrymaking."

"I can't see," he rejoined, with bitter impatience, "that one must be so merry because it happens to be one's wedding-day. I should have supposed you above all notions of that sort."

"I am afraid I always shall be jarring your fine sense," I said, with a lamentable effort at a tone of irony that broke into a full and most unredeemable sob, "with my absurd superstitious ideas. I—I was old-fashioned enough to hope that I—might—have been happy to-morrow."

"My dear," he said, "you do love me then."

No word, for I could not speak. I dared not look up; only, one by one the tears fell heavily upon the two hands I had taken in mine.

"That is well," he said, bending over me, "God reward you for all you are, and have been to me, Jeannette—to me, who am so unworthy of you. But you will have patience with me, child—you are so generous—I know that. I have so much need of it, and of your love. Do these seem strange words—weak and selfish? Well, they are—perhaps. I think, sometimes, I shall go mad—mad! Child, I have things to try me that you cannot dream of, and—" and dropping my hands, he turned away.

"Indeed I——"

"And God forbid you ever should! I only tell you because I want you to understand how all my desire is to make you so happy—to keep every shadow from you, if I can but find how to do it. And you—I want you to save me from myself. You are such a dear, wise companion, and when you are my wife, Jeannette—a wife can do so

much! Don't turn from me now, and say, 'because of this and because of that,' we must keep apart. Why, if there's so much trouble and pain in the world, we—you and I, Jeannette—have the more need to be together. Come, dear, look into that rich store of common-sense of yours."

"One would think," I said, half smiling through my tears, half frowning, "that I was made up of it."

"And are you not? Ask yourself what difference it can make to that poor woman. Would the knowledge that her misfortune is keeping us asunder bring her any alleviation? You can smile more kindly than that now, Jeannette. Come, look into my face, and tell me that, 'tide life, 'tide death, I shall find my bride at the altar to-morrow morning."

"She will be there," I said, once again placing my hands in his outstretched to

receive them, and lifting them to his lips he kissed them.

“Your word is your bond,” he said, cheerily. “And so good-bye. Keep tryst, my dear.”

And he hurried away.

CHAPTER XII.

A CONFESSION.

“**A**S if I didn’t know,” said Dolly, bustling about now in a flutter of final preparation, “how you’d come to your senses when Sir Morton had had his say. No, deary, no, the larded fowl’s to go here, that’s where the trifle——Now, I tell you what it is, Miss Netta, you’re a deal more hindrance than you are help. Of course you are. And just you take your white face upstairs and have a sleep——Faddin’ about like this! Why, you’ll not be fit to be seen the morn! Look here now,

darling, me and Miss Lina can do every bit that's left to be done. It's next to nothing, now."

"Where is Lina?"

"In the kitchen, with one of my coarse aprons pinned up to her chin, makin' a mayonnaise, and Scamp sittin' on the chair watching of her, as if he'd like a taste. Law bless the dog! and if he'd got the whole boilin' of it, he'd just turn tail and walk off. Animals and us is all alike. We don't never know what's good for us a bit. So just you take my advice, and go and give that poor foot a rest. It hurts you, that's plain to see. No, there's not even a flower to set. She's done it all."

And so I toilesomely begin to ascend the stairs, and, as I reach the upper landing, I find myself in a bower fit for a fairy queen, its soft white muslin draperies festooned with white and blush roses, and here and

there tiny bunches of turquoise blue forget-me-nots, peeping modestly forth from the dark shining green leaves. If Dolly had not said whose work it was, its manner of doing would have told all the story. No other hands could have done it with such perfect taste.

And the heart that moved them to the task? Was it possible to look round at these evidences, and think of her as other than the purest, sweetest of God's created things? And yet what if this work of her hands be like that other? And the memory of Morton's words that night on the terrace comes back to me, when he said that the power of musical expression might, after all, be a mere mechanical one, a trick of the fingers, in which neither heart nor soul has part. Why, that arch-fiend, Judge Jeffreys, of the Black Assize, was a fine musician, they say. Heart, forsooth! and what if she

Tugnutt," says the low, clear voice of St. Cross's curate in charge.

"Oh, that needs no sayin', sir," readily assents Dolly. "She never did stick yet at spendin' of herself to death, to save a body a hair o' pain, if so be as she can. Nor Miss Isoline neither. *She* won't do instead, I suppose Mr. Glas'nbury?"

"No," replies Swithin. "It is Miss Latour, Lady Havering wishes to see."

"That's just like sick folks, now an't it? Wilful as door-posts, just neck or nothing with 'em always. Well, well——"

"Lady Havering wants to see me, do you say, Mr. Glastonbury?" I ask, descending the stairs.

"Yes," he says, with a calmness beneath which I fancy I detect a strange tremulous agitation, "will you come?"

"Is it—absolutely necessary?" I ask, with an involuntary shrinking.

For an instant he too hesitates, then he says,

“I would not have troubled you in any other case, and,”—he casts a swift glance at the festive board—“especially at such a time, but she is——”

“Not dying?”

“Apparently not. And she is perfectly conscious—has been all the time I have been with her, though at first,”—again he hesitated—“at first I fancied her mind was wandering, and it might do so at any moment, Sir James says. Even while I stand here——”

“I will come at once.”

And without more words, I find myself with Mr. Glastonbury beside me, on my way to the cottage. Hardly a syllable is uttered between us, only as we pass the Priest’s Tower I shiver, and he gently warns me that I shall find Lady Havering much changed.

"It could not be otherwise, I suppose ; but," I added, with a touch of injured pride, "I have no hare's heart, I hope, Mr. Glastonbury."

"If you had," he said, "I do not know how I should have dared to ask you to come."

And then he said no more, until he lifted the latch of the cottage door, and, as we both entered, asked me to wait while he acquainted Lady Havering of my coming. The little sitting-room was empty. I glanced round its clean but smoke-embrowned walls, decorated with a cadaverously-hued portrait of the Princess of Wales in her bridal bravery, and a couple of highly-coloured works of art, respectively setting forth the kiss of Judas and the death of Ananias. Flanking the diminutive chimney-glass which reflected my face in such a manner as to engender in me a shrinking admiration of its power of holding itself up

to nature, mingled with latent hope that its realistic properties might even be over-accentuated, for a more ghastly, unprepossessing countenance than its presentment of mine, I have rarely seen—flanking this most useful article of furniture, hung two black paper silhouettes of the worthy master and mistress of the little domain, while a china Scotch shepherdess, embracing with fingerless hands a hoseless lamb, grinned vacuously at me from the narrow mantel-ledge whose stove enshrined a gorgeous “ornamental” paper of puce and magenta frilling on a sea-green ground.

A magnificent carved oaken press, black with age, that would have made the glory of a virtuoso’s dining-room, crowned with a Bible of monstrously inconvenient practical dimensions, and a gaudy paraffin lamp, faced the window, which contained, besides the

bow-pot, a couple of ginger-beer bottles, to lure thirsty wayfarers. Drawn up beside the little table, stood a capacious old Windsor arm-chair, on whose seat, as if hurriedly thrown down, lay an open copy of the current Quarterly, Morton's companion, no doubt, through the past weary night hours. I took it up ; only a page of it cut here and there in a desultory sort of way, as if the reader's thoughts had not been all with the subject of the article, which bore upon certain recent French and English renderings of Dante. A theme of themes with Morton, as I knew well, the mighty Italian, and his mind must have been sorely distracted, before he would have left it with uncut pages ; and yet stay, some attention he must have vouchsafed it, for here, lightly scored, is a quoted passage from "Purgatorio."

*"Ma dimmi : al tempo de' dolci sospiri,
A che, e come, concedette Amore,*

Che conoscete i dubbiosi desiri ?
E' della a me : Nessun maggior dolore,
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria."

With a sigh, I lay down the book, and turn to find Swithin Glastonbury beside me.

"Will you come now?" he says, taking me by the hand with a firm hold, but which yet trembled slightly. Did he think, after all, it was needed to give me courage ?

Well, he was right, perhaps; I could hardly have been prepared, unless I had been going into the presence of death itself, to have seen what I saw then. No corpse could have lain more still than the figure stretched upon that bed, whose poor washed-out blue checked curtains cast an additional pallor upon the features, always immobile, but rigid now in their ghastly linen swathings, whence a few grizzled hairs straggled over the lofty narrow forehead. A light sheet, all the weight her shattered body could

bear, covered the gaunt limbs that seemed to have grown preternaturally long, and added to the vraisemblance of death. But the illusion was momentary, for, with the sense of my presence, she turned her eyes upon me, the old keen eager light in them, grown lurid now, as they gleamed from their cavernous hollows, and with her right hand, the one uninjured limb, beckoned me closer.

“You are come then, Jeannette Latour,” she said at last, in tones that fell hollow upon the silence, only broken by the light flapping of the little dimity window-curtain against the open lattice, for a breeze had sprung up, and the fair day had clouded over. “You are come then, I say,” she reiterated, when, with a peremptory wave of her bony hand, she had dismissed Althea and Sir James. “Tell him to stay within call,” she added, looking after

Swithin Glastonbury as he too went out. He heard, but made no other answer than to stand for a moment as if irresolute, then he cast a long glance at her, full of some eloquent entreaty, but she did not, or feigned not, to see it, and he followed the other two, and closed the door. "Come to have your triumph over me," she went on, keeping her glittering, inquisitive glance on my face, while her thin, pain-wrung lips twitched with the old sarcastic jerk. "It's nice for you, isn't it, to find me like this?"

"God forbid!" shuddered I. "Why should I——"

"Retribution!" she interrupted. "That's what you call it."

"Indeed——"

"Be silent! 'Stricken by the visitation of God.' That's how you'd put it in the newspapers, if you had the story to tell, wouldn't you? But you'd lie, you'd lie, young wo-

man! I suffer in a righteous cause. Not one of Bloody Mary's martyrs was more a martyr than I am. It was as a witness to the truth that I went to the Priest's Tower last night, and I had my reward; for I heard it—heard it as the stones fell upon me. The last words left her lips—Sharples—I was waiting for her there—do you understand?"

"I think I do."

"That's well," gasped she. "Waiting there, to hear how all your lust of happiness and your pride of life, Jeannette Latour, had been trampled down. And I did hear it, I tell you; as the stones fell upon me I heard it. And it is not you, but her—her still, that he loves, as he always did. Isoline, your sister, and not you! not you! not you!"

"I know it, Lady Havering," I said, steadily gazing at the face lit up with fiend-

ish, selfish malice. "Your waiting-woman was not the only listener in the wood last night." Her lean jaw dropped with undisguised amazement and curiosity. "I was there too," I went on, "and heard all, and—but it is enough, and, if you sent for me to tell me this, you can spare yourself—and me. You can, you see, tell me nothing that I do not know."

"Oh, ho! Can I not? Can I not, young woman! That is only—but wait," she said, interrupting herself. "Tell me—since you have that at your fingers' ends—what are you going to do?"

"Do?"

"Ay. How is it going to influence your actions?" she said, in cold, calm, expectant tones, and letting the bluish, pale lids fall upon her steely gaze.

"It can have no influence of any sort," I said.

The lids opened again to their utmost width, and every nerve of her seemed attently strained as I went on.

“Sir Morton and I are to be married to-morrow morning.”

She shuddered; then a faint sneer parted her straight, bloodless lips. “And the joy-bells are to ring, eh?” she said, “and——”

“Indeed no. There can be only the simple ceremony. Any rejoicings must be kept——”

“For the day I die.”

“For shame, Lady Havering!”

“Never mind. And so that is how you mean to hold him to his bargain. You mean to be his wife?—in spite of what you heard?”

“And of what I saw. Yes.”

“That is your final resolution?”

“It is.”

"You are a shameless woman. You come here and blazon this in my face."

"You send for me, and I have answered your questions. I was not bound to do so. And now I leave you to think of me as you please. I could never hope to be fairly judged by you, Lady Havering; for though I have never knowingly done you a harm—"

"Never thwarted me, and robbed my child of her lawful rights? Never come between her and Morton Havering—oh, laugh if you please!—with your beautiful face and your proud, syren ways? She would have been his wife, I tell you, but for you and that meek, modest little dissembler, your sister——"

"Woman!" I cried, wheeling fiercely round upon her; for I had turned to go.

"Ay," she laughed. "Dare me to my face if you like. I cannot stir—you know that; but dissembler she is, and you think so. Ha t

bite your lip, and writhe like the wretched, wounded thing you are—but false and deceitful you think her. Deny that if you can. Ha!”

“Let that be,” I said, in a choking voice.

“What my sister is——”

“Or isn’t,” she interrupted, with quick, strange vehemence.

I bent assentingly.

“Quite so,” I said. “What she may or may not be, we need not discuss. It is enough that——”

“It is not enough!” she shrieked, and stretching out her lank arm that was clutching my gown, she strove to drag me to her. “It is nothing, this that you heard—last night. No more than the end of a beginning that began a year ago.”

“A year ago?” I said, mechanically.

“Yes, yes, in St. Grimwold’s wood, before she—your sister Isoline—went away to

Germany. Are you going to tell me you do not know why she went? Well, you are capable of anything that you think will win your ends, are you not? Why do you suppose she broke with Morton?" she said, panting for breath.

"Because," faltered I, "she did not love him, and——"

"She did! I tell you she would have died for him! She owned that to me. And she sacrificed herself for him, and for you—for you!"

"Are you mad?" I asked, gazing at her wild, glittering eyes.

"More sane than you are!" she said, her voice sinking to quiet, measured tones. "And I tell you, Jeannette Latour, that she gave him up to you—for your sake! Why do you look at me like that? I am in my senses, I tell you—now. I was not then. Fool, blind dupe that I was, not to see

what the end of it would be! I never thought that what I told her would ever come about as it has. I thought only of separating them, and winning him for the wife he had a right to him. She has no other friends. I was justified——"

"I will not be the friend of a woman!" I said, holding my free hand. "What was it that——" "What was it that——" "What was it that——"

"Tell me if you please," she said, looking at me, like a child. "A little——"

"I will tell you," I said, faintly. "I will tell you how you loved her, and how she loved you, and how she died with a smile on her face, and how she died almost——" "afterwards——"

“What of her?” I challenged. “What have you both done?”

“I—should like to—tell you all, but—a drink of water—water,” she gasped, with a sudden access of pallor, “but my strength,”—she went on, when she had swallowed a little. “To-morrow I might have been stronger; but that would have been—too late—too late,” and she glided her pale, handsome fingers to and fro upon the sheet in some extremity of agony, bodily or mental, both perhaps. “Ask him—he has it all,” she continued, after a brief interval.

“Whom?”

“Swithin Glastonbury. Has it all written down. It—it concerned him. I knew of his—infatuation for you, and I chose—I hate him—and I chose that he should know you as you are—and see you writhe and flinch.—Oh! this pain—this pain! To think—I—should be or—ordained to suffer

this ! I liked him to see you foiled, and—ah, the pain !” Her voice died hoarsely, her ashy face grew livid, and beads of agony broke out upon it. I seized a flask of brandy, and moistened her lips with it. “But you don’t mind,” she said, opening her eyes, as the paroxysm passed away. “It pleases you, doesn’t it ? Well, shall I tell you—now—how I told her—all the—hundred pretty little stories—Sharples told me——”

“Sharples ! Oh ! great heaven ! Lies ! lies ! all of them,” I groaned.

“Told me,” she insisted, with a curious wrinkling up of her forehead, as if she accepted the allegation with something of satisfaction, “of all his little attentions to you while he lay ill at Cliffe Cottage, and all your tricks and coquetries. Oh ! and you began soon, did you not ?—Don’t deny it—What good is there in that ? Sharples saw you—with your hand in his on the very

night you got him into your power. You don't deny it—you can't answer."

I could not indeed. I could only stand dumb with amazement before the base suspicions of evil which these two women must have nursed and fostered together.

"You didn't guess that Sharples was watching you then. Ha!"

"I thought my eyes deceived me," I replied, summoning back all the memories of that night, "that I must have been dreaming. I could not credit that any woman would stoop so low as to play the spy on me in my own house, and at your bidding. It must have been so."

She smiled.

"These heroics are wasted on me—or, at least, save them till I tell you——"

"You have told me enough," I said; "I can guess the rest. It is easy to judge of the whole piece by the vile, soiled sample."

Spare yourself the trouble of unravelling your tissue of spying and lies. It is superfluous. I understand it all."

"Well?" she said, with eager curiosity.

"Well, it shows me no more than that, by a series of mean, paltry tricks, you have tried to throw dirt upon me—to find some flaw in me which should make me hateful in Morton Havering's eyes, to serve your own wretched ambition; and you have failed. In any case you would have done that. Do you think, if you had rid yourself of me—of us—a dozen of us, he would have married your Ursula?—a poor creature your own unnatural, unsympathetic ways have goaded to semi-idiocy? Never. You have staked your honesty and your woman's dignity upon a losing game. You have lost, Lady Havering, doubly lost."

"And you," she said, "you have won, you think?"

"I know I have, such a winning as it is," I groaned, out of the bitterness of my soul, which lay all pitilessly bared before her.

"And you mean to marry him to-morrow?"

"To-morrow I shall be his wife." And then once again I turned to go.

"Stay!" she cried. "Call that man—Swithin Glastonbury, and—and the rest of them. Call them all. Is not Morton Haverling here?" she asked, looking from one to the other of the trio, when they had obeyed my summons.

"He is not," said Althea; "he is gone to Haverling."

"What for?" sharply demanded she.

Althea glanced uneasily at me, and stammered out something about "to-morrow, and final preparations." Lady Haverling said nothing, only set her lips, with the evil smile that never yet boded good for those

it concerned, and motioned Swithin to the side of the bed facing me.

“Where’s that paper?” she demanded of him then.

“Here,” he answered, in an almost inaudible voice, laying a hand on the breast of his close clerical coat, while his face paled and flushed with some agitation he strove in vain to conceal.

“Read it,” she said, in a calm, passionless voice.

“Lady Havering,” interposed Sir James, “all this excitement is not good for you. Is this necessary—absolutely necessary—now? Can it not be deferred till——”

“When you have heard you will be able to judge whether it can,” she answered, not looking at him, but fixing her hateful basilisk eyes on me. “Read.”

Slowly Swithin Glastonbury drew forth a roll of manuscript, and with trembling

fingers turned over its half dozen closely written sheets.

“‘I, Eudoxia Havering, being——’”

“Leave that. Sir James here will witness for me that I am as much in my senses as any of you here,” she said, glancing round the circle of perturbed and half-scared faces, and then again letting the hard, merciless gaze focus all its cold light on mine. “Leave that, and—come to—the last page. The rest she can have to read—at her—pleasure. ‘And so I told Isoline Latour,’ begin there.”

“‘And so,’” read Swithin, his delicate features bloodless as some pain-wrung martyr’s, and in a voice that now and again, in spite of his best endeavours, failed him as it might have done if he had been reading the burial valediction over some dear friend’s grave.

“‘And so at last I told Isoline Latour,

how, hidden in my pew in the chancel, I listened for more than half an hour to Jeannette Latour's insane cries and sobbings, and her profane and idolatrous prayers before that painted, popish idol, for the man she loved, my nephew——’”

Swithin's voice grew inaudible.

“Well,” she said, “you have his name.”

“Lady Havering!” I cried, imploringly, sinking down behind the bed and hiding my burning face.

“Go on. ‘My nephew, Morton Havering.’ Well?”

“‘And how she dared, with her hands clasped against that image's very feet, to pray for them both, and so for herself, that the love she had for him should never come to be known by mortal creature, but only by——’

“Lady Havering,” said Swithin, throwing down the paper, “I can read no more,

I will not. I have done—God is my witness, what violence I have done to my own feelings, in reading your confession.”

“My what?” shrieked she, furiously.

“Call it what you please,” he replied, calmly. “If ever sinner needed shrift, you did. And this morning your stained conscience—in all its fear of death, and in much seeming penitence—implored it of me, and in God’s name I gave it you. And now, is this the atoning you promised? Am I called upon to help you torture this woman?” and a trembling yet firm hand was laid upon my bowed head, “and in her myself? I tell you no, I will read no more.”

I dared, as he spoke, to lift my shame-dyed face to his. A scarlet flush burned into the clear, ivory cheek, and his eyes, full of a strange mingling of indignation and of infinite loving pity, were transfixing the merciless face upon the pillow.

"Give me the paper," she said, after a pause that seemed an eternity. He made no attempt to obey, and it was Sir James who placed it within her reach. Glaring at him defiantly as her claw-like fingers gripped the paper, she thrust it between my clasped hands.

"Take it!" she gasped convulsively. "It—is for you—all—for you. Stay—no, you—you must not be so selfish as—that. You——" and slowly, over the keen glitter of her eyes, a dull, metallic, bluish haze came spreading. "You might read it—alone to your—your bridegroom,—your impatient bridegroom. It will—ha! ha!—it will amuse you—both—so much till—till to-morrow—to—mor—row—morn——"

The rest, as it quivered away inarticulately upon her gibbering lips, was lost in a screech of prolonged unearthly laughter, and then a silence that afterwards I came to know was

worse than death, for sanity took its eternal leave of her then, reigned in the little room until a voice low and infinitely tender bade me rise up ; and the hand that lay upon me drew me away, out into the sweet pure evening air.

CHAPTER XIII.

“AND TO-MORROW.”

“WHY did she make me take this?” I said, looking from the roll of paper my hands held, to Swithin Glastonbury where he stood beside the little rustic seat in the porch on which I had sunk down. “I know enough. What good can it do to dissect this loathsome mass of deceit? I am not so dull but that I understand it. She has given me the clue, and the whole is as clear as if I had seen all with my own eyes. If she was capable of all that she has confessed to me, the rest would be easy enough to her. Why should I read it?” and I

passionately tore the manuscript through.

“No, no,” he answered, staying my hands from completing its destruction. “But it would be best to read it. Perhaps to know all, would come to be—one day a sort of satisfaction. It would make things clearer.”

“That is not possible,” I said, with a bitter smile. Nevertheless I gathered the torn papers together again, and, glancing towards the chaise, rose from my seat. “I will go home now, Mr. Glastonbury.”

He opened the wicket for me to pass out, and crossed to where Sir Peter stood, tranquilly resting his nose in the carressing arms of young Dibbins, the little fellow who two months since had been invalided, now a convalescent. Dismissing him with some largesse which kindled an ecstatic glow in the bronzed but still delicate face, Mr. Glastonbury led the

chaise close up beside me, and placing the reins in my hands, after I had taken my seat, drew a pace back and stood silently. I looked into his pale grave face with some vague seeking after the pitying sweetness which so often I had seen glorify it at the sight of suffering; but there seemed none for me. No mask could have looked more expressionless and impassive. Was this indeed the same face which had been moved with such agitation, eloquent with such passionate pleading, two little month sago, when last he had stood beside me on this very spot? This the man whom the poor and grief-worn cared to see enter their doors?

His gaze fell as I looked at him, and he hurriedly consulted his watch, and said, apologetically,

“I am due at St. Grimwold’s at seven. If—I can be of—if you will excuse me, my brother priest is absent, and even-song——”

“It is well to be made of the stuff you are, Mr. Glastonbury,” I said, with a ghastly attempt at a smile. “I suppose if there came an earthquake, and the bell began to ring for matins or even-song, you would be at your post. Duty is your motive power, like a machine that——”

“It ought to be so——”

“Then it is yours now,” I broke forth, desperately, “to tell me what mine is! If you are true, as they say you are, to the God you serve, you will spare yourself time to tell me what I ought to do, and——”

“Why do you ask me?” he said, impassively, yet with the faintest accentuation on the last word.

“In all the wide world,” I passionately demanded, “to whom can I turn? Is it not you, and such as you, who are bound to stretch out a helping hand to creatures stranded as I am?”

"For such as I am, it is, yes," he said, slowly, "but not for me."

"And why not for you?"

"Because," he said, turning his face, wrung with agony, on me—"because the vilest wretch breathing is more fit to counsel you than I am."

"Are you such a blind guide as that?" I replied, with a cold, contemptuous laugh.

"Ay, blind indeed, weak as water, in your presence, Jeannette, and you ought to know it—you do know it."

"I cannot pretend to misunderstand you, but I thought—I had hoped," I stammered, "that that fancy had passed——"

"I hoped you might think so," he interrupted. "I have tried that you should. You are so generous, it might have vexed you now and then if you had thought—it was different. And do you think I would pain you now with such a retrospect if—if

you had not asked me for what I cannot trust myself to give ? You would not have me turn traitor to myself and you ? Oh ! don't mistake me ; it is not that I buoy myself up with any vain hope that, if you did not become that man's wife——”

“Not—his—wife ?” I gasped.

“—Not his wife, that there would be hope for me. No ; but—but I cannot counsel you. I think there is not one on earth who can. Only your own heart—your own God-directed, pure, high, noble heart—can tell you what you must do.”

“And to-morrow so near !” I murmured.

“To-morrow,” he said, turning abruptly away, and, taking Sir Peter by the bit, he led him slowly round—“to-morrow at eleven o'clock. Those were my instructions, unless”—he paused and flushed deeply—“unless there should be any alteration, any change.”

“What change should there be?” I said, hardly so much as acknowledging, as I drove on, the lifting of his broad-brimmed hat.

So silently, on reaching the house, I entered it, that I succeeded in finding my way to my room unheard by the busy people clattering in the kitchen, and, fastening the door, I threw myself on the bed, and, flattening out the torn manuscript, leaned my aching head on my hands, and set myself to master its contents. But I had been only right when I said they were a superfluity—just a recapitulation of the successful system of espionage Lady Havering had established over Isoline and me from the first moment of Sir Morton’s setting his foot in Havering—an ugly, clumsy web of deceit, undistinguished even by any mark of cleverness or ingenuity. The utter unsuspicion of Lina and Sir Morton had made small tax upon the undoubted powers, in

this direction, of her ladyship and her cat's-paw, Sharples; and it had been hardly a more difficult task to hoodwink me. Perhaps the very dislike I entertained to Lady Havering had rendered it still easier, since the consciousness of my very scanty modicum of affection for her had always warned me from gratuitously nursing prejudice, and bidden me stifle down any suspicions that had been for ever cropping up in my mind concerning her and her ways. "Noblesse oblige," and I had hated myself whenever, in spite of my best efforts to crush the fancy, I had suspected her capable of some shadow of all this wickedness that she had been guilty of by testimony of her signed confession here in my hands.

It had been so inconceivable that, to feed an unattainable ambition, and pamper a devilish spirit of revenge, the nobility of her race could have been dragged down to

grovel in the mire like this. Yet here in black and white, beyond all doubt, the loathsome tale stood recorded of how she had compassed our misery. How she, touched, heaven knows why, with dread of our coming in Sir Morton's way, had set the ubiquitous Mrs. Abigail to dog his footsteps and ours, about the Havering lanes, and how through his invalided days at Cliffe Cottage she had flitted from house to garden, from room to room, to store up all she might hear and see, and so carry her precious acquisitions home to her mistress. As at dawning on the night of his delirious dreaming, when, with his hand grasping mine, Sir Morton had fancied himself in his old Italian home, so, later on, she had been lurking, as indeed I had suspected, among the bushes that moonlit night when he had spoken his thanks for the service I had been able to render him, and no less she had con-

trived to be a witness to many a tender little scene between Isoline and him, and all this she had scraped together, and cast into the ugly mould of her own mind for my lady's pleasure.

Oh ! that old tale comes to my mind, as I read, of the Phrygian king beneath whose touch everything turned to gold. Surely it is as true that things heaven-pure may be smirched to foulest mud by meddling like this ! And so, strong in her false knowledge of us, Lady Havering had effected her first brilliant stroke, in that encounter with me in the chancel of Havering church, when the rain drove her to take shelter there, and again, for twice the elements had helped her, her experience of that afternoon had forged for her the weapons she had turned against Isoline, when she ran her to earth in St. Grimwold's wood, and trampled down the heart which, of all I had ever known,

ever could know, was the humblest, proudest, most unselfish, most delicately sensitive.

An easier prey never fell before evil passion. Oh ! Lina, when I think now of you, my darling, and what you bore for me, I could bite the dust with humiliation at the thoughts that sometimes I used to have of you. And those bitter taunts I flung at you, when your heart was bearing the cruellest pain a woman can ever know, the conviction that she does not possess the love of the man who has asked her to share his life with him ! And so you went, for his sake—for mine, you went, carrying your burden—how was it you could bear it?—hiding all your anguish, and never a cry, never a murmur ! Oh ! my dear, you learned the old, old story of the Master's living and dying to some purpose ! and, in your own sweet, silent way, have striven indeed to follow where He led !

I think, as I pen this record of you, I hear some pity you mockingly for having been so easily “taken in,” as people call it. My darling, for all their high self-valuation, and canny knowledge of good and evil, I would not give your weakness, born of your true humble-mindedness, that made you so strong, kindling all the flame of your high, pure nature, and taught me that the greatest heroines of all time were never greater than my quiet, undemonstrative, pretty sister. Dear child! I know you now as you are. If you have been dear to me always, how is it now with me? How is it now that the clouds which for a while dimmed my love have cleared, and left the glory of your being a thousand fold more lustrous, till its brightness dazzles me? Child! child! you are my sister once more. Ten times my sister now. I have won you back. But the price of you—is the cost of him. No, no,

don't say that. Oh, love! love! no, not that! And I dash the papers from me, and spring to my feet. The sacrifice is too great. I cannot yield him up! It cannot be that this should be demanded of me! Anything but that—anything; and my dazed eyes stare tensely into the twilight shadows, till there seems to loom forth a gracious yet stern figure, whose face is hooded like some sibyl's, on whose either hand stand the two her decrees have once sundered; and then, low but clear as stroke of funeral-bell, a voice seems to bid me pronounce what shall be.

“Nay, but I cannot give him up,” I wail out, with piteous wringing of my hands. “I cannot do it and live.” And the hooded head bends low.

“Your will for good and evil is free. Their future hangs upon your word,” it seems to say.

"Why should I tear out my heart?" I cry. "She has asked no such sacrifice of me. And he—he——"

"Choose," interrupts the voice.

"I cannot. Oh! God! This is too much! I——"

"Netta! Netta! Let me in."

And the awful voice of my distraught fancy dies away into the soft reality of Iso-line's, where she stands beating a tattoo upon my door outside.

"We didn't know you'd come back," she said, as I fling it open, and looking, as she speaks, a little shrinkingly up at me. Was she thinking of my harsh, abrupt parting from her the night before? for as long ago as that it was. It seemed as if we had purposely avoided each other that live-long day. "We hadn't the least idea you'd come in, till Reuben——Netta, what's the matter?"

"Matter?"

"You look so——"

"How do I look?" I said, with a hollow laugh, crossing to the toilette-glass to ascertain for myself; and seeing in it the ghastly reflected pallor of my cheeks, and eyes that glittered coal-bright in their dry, aching sockets. "Like a maniac!" I went on, taking up a brush and smoothing into something of decency my tossed and rumpled hair. "There, that's better. Give me a kiss, Lina," and I drew her into my arms and slaked my burning lips on the fair, pure face. "And that," I said, kissing her again and again, "is better still. You don't know what good that has done me."

"I am glad of it," she said, with a little laugh of perplexity. "I was almost afraid I—I had vexed you about something."

"When?"

"Last night." Her voice sank.

"What a notion !"

"But you know I would never do that if—if——"

"If you could help it ; and if you could not help it, why, then, that would never be vexing me. My dear, what nonsense for us to talk such polite inanities to each other ! Well, what do you want to know ?" for while I spoke she was narrowly scrutinizing my face.

"What did she send for you for, Netta ?" she asked, gravely. "Was it to tell you anything particular ?"

"Nothing to spend time in repeating," I said, lightly.

"Then she did say something ?" insisted Lina.

"I believe she did ; but——"

"She's mad, you know," said Lina, tentatively.

"Oh ! no."

"Sir James has just come back, and he says so," she insisted.

"She was not so when I was with her, Lina," I said, glancing at the manuscript. "Mr. Glastonbury will witness to you that her mind was perfectly collected this morning, and—up to the time I left her."

"Well, whatever she said to you, Jeannette," said Lina, "whether she was in her senses or not, you ought to take it——"

"With a grain of salt? I wish we had always done that, Lina. It might be better for us all now."

"I don't think," she said, sturdily, bending over the window-sill and sniffing softly at the jasmine, "things could very well be better than they are now."

"Now God be thanked," said Alice the nurse,
'That all comes round so just and fair.'

That's just how it is, Netta; and you are very happy to-night, aren't you, though you

do look so—so fagged out?—but that is no wonder. You are very, very happy ; you ought to be, I do think.”

“My darling, I am, of course—as happy as—you look.”

“Do I look so?” she asked, cheerily. “I’m so glad. Good night. I do hope that the sun means to shine to-morrow,” she added, glancing, as she went out, at the heavy clouds night was bringing with it.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BRIDAL TOILETTE.

THEY say that men on the eve of certain death will sleep well, and, lulled to rest by the hammering of their scaffold nails, will dream of their happiest days. It may be so, but—That is a strange comparison for me to be setting up at such a time. And yet not so strange; it must be pure contrast that has brought me to picture to myself the last earthly resting of a criminal—a criminal! and are all doomed men and women criminals?—the very force it is, no doubt, of contrast that supplies me my comparison on this eve of my wedding-

day with the night that foregoes death. A blessing it may be for the poor wretches whose little earthly span lies behind them, to bid their eternal farewell of it, in the glamour of sweet dreams; but for me, surely the converse holds, for I cannot sleep, and it must be for thinking of that new life and those untold joys the coming day is to bring.

One by one my little eight-day clock on the mantelpiece tingles out the hours, and through the answering chime of Havering church tower, I fancy I catch the everlasting song of St. Grimwold's Abbey bells, wafted in upon the warm west wind sighing about my open window.

Hours ago, leaden clouds obscured the sickly-looking moon, not a star-gleam shines, and towards three o'clock the rain begins to patter down with dull, persistent monotony that seems to hiss mockingly,

"Happy is the bride that the sun shines on." Ah! what aggravating creatures those old axiom-mongers were, with their absurd superstitions, which all the wise sciences under the sun can never frown down—irrepressible pretty weeds cropping up in Common Sense's neat garden, which nobody has the heart, even if they had the power, to pluck out. "Happy is the bride that the sun shines on—sun shines—sun shines on," whispers the rain. Well, and if Solon's self had propounded the sapient proposition, are there not hours yet between this and morning, for the air to right itself?—and how many a dark night brings a joyful day!—and if all the elements should combine against me, can I not defy them in this security of happiness and panoply of content that is mine—mine at last?

Who can rob me of that? Come fire, come frost, come life, come death, my love

is mine, and I stand crowned in my triumph over all. My foot is on that evil woman's neck; she has done her worst, shrieked her vain threats in my face, bared her mean soul before me, and still—is he not mine? Is not his most sacred word plighted to me, and will I yield it up?

Will I part with my life's blood? Ask me that.

Who shall dare to stop my idol car, and live? Might is on my side, and right—— Is Isoline asleep, I wonder? And I open my door and listen. Not a sound. All silent as a tomb that covers dead men's hopes. Sleeping, his whole length guardfully stretched along the mat before her door, lies Scamp. His brown eyes questioningly seek mine for an instant, and with a faint wave of his tail, and a low contented whine which says plainer than speech—"Ah, it's all right, it's only you," settles to his dog's sleep again.

Oh, Scamp ! Scamp ! I should like to see any harmful thing contest your right of way there. What is it about her that has won your brave little heart, just as it wins the homage of all who come near her ? I am kindness itself to you—you can't deny that, Scamp, and I stroke you, and twiddle your ears, and minister to your appetite with tit-bits till Mrs. Dolly rebukes me for my ways, and for all this you are exceedingly affable and polite to me. But I take you, sir, at your true valuation, and I know that it is the reflected honour of my kinship with Lina that specially commends me to your esteem ; and I am quite sure that no secondary consideration would keep you back for one instant from flying at me, and tearing me to pieces, with your pretty little white teeth, if you thought I had any idea of harming a hair of her head. Isn't it so, Scamp ? But I am her sister, you think to

yourself, and your vigilance may rest on, may it not? and you can dream away undisturbed of those village cats, and disreputable unlicensed curs, who make your waking life such a sweet burden to you. And meantime the night is passing away, and dawn is breaking, tearfully, with just one streak of palest yellow sunlight athwart my window-blind, that fades at its birth, and the rain rains on sans intermission; and the household stir and fuss begin, and I hear Dolly issuing final orders to her myrmidons downstairs, and presently I catch a transient glimpse of a portly gentleman in a funereally sable suit of satin shining cloth adorned about the bosom with a white rosette of cheese-plate dimensions, whom I utterly fail to recognise until a chance movement of his protecting gingham umbrella reveals Mr. Reuben Tugnutt, and the minutes tick on, and the rain patters hopeless-

ly. Half-past eight brings Dolly to my door with a cup of tea, and a curious olla podrida of cheery words and dismal jeremiads on the state of the weather.

“But never fret, deary. You’re not going to marry the weather, nor his clerk nether, and if—lawk a mussy—Bless that dog now! comin’ bumpin’ of himself plump up against one’s legs like that! sendin’ all the tea over the tray! Down, sir! you’re a—now do look at him, deary, do. That’s Miss Lina’s doin’s, and he’s come to show you,” and Dolly’s ire rippled all away into a chuckle of amusement. “She’s gone and dressed him up with white bows as ridiclus as us Christians! Look now, don’t he look as if he thought a deal of himself. He’ll be coming to church next.”

“Doesn’t he look a dear?” cried his mistress ecstatically, as she swept, in her soft trailing white dress, into my room.

“He wouldn’t have it on at first, at any price; and kept rolling over, and wanted to bite it off, but I’ve brought him to reason, and—doesn’t it become him splendidly, Netta?”

“Almost as splendidly as that dress does you,” I said, carried out of myself for one brief instant by the instinctive feminine passion which deserves for its saving influences some kinder name than it generally bears. “You’ve completed your toilette betimes, Lina.”

“Why, yes,” she said, “for I must be your ladyship’s maid to-day. Mistress of the robes—tirewoman—what is it?—and time,” did her lips tremble a little,—“time flies. We must not keep the bridegroom waiting.”

“He would be so awfully impatient, wouldn’t he?”

She made no answer, but turned, and gathering up my wedding-dress, from

where it lay in state, over her arms, helped me to put it on. "He would be so impatient, don't you think?" I insisted. "Why didn't you answer my question?"

"It was such a stupid one," she bluntly answered.

"But really—would he show becoming fortitude, do you suppose, if——"

"If what?" she said, testily.

"If—nothing. It was only a joke. Very unbecoming the solemnity of the occasion, though, wasn't it? But I feel so merry. My bosom's lord sits so lightly on its throne, Lina. One should be so happy on one's wedding-day, shouldn't one?"

"Oh, yes."

"If one doesn't laugh then, when is one to?"

"Oh, no."

"And under such happy auspices, eh? With—a—lover who worships the ground

I tread on? Say he does, now, Lina. Just to make the little romance complete, you know. Say he does, dear."

"He—ought——"

"Oh, he does. He does, of course. If I thought he didn't, I'd just—stab him with these little embroidery scissors."

"Jeannette!"

"Or perhaps it would be better to run away, and leave him to—his fate. I wonder what it would be."

"Don't be absurd," she said, fastening the silken lace of my satin corsage with a little jerk. "It would vex him to hear you talk like that."

"What a pity we forgot to lay in a stock of Rose Pompadour, or Bloom of Ninon, or something for my behoof this morning! Tallow and cream-colour really do not form an exhilarating combination. If Sir Morton wishes in any way to atone for my

shortcomings, he will come forth to—the sacrifice radiant as a sun-god. Sun? Oh! Jupiter!—Jupiter Pluvius! Look at the rain, Lina!”

“A good thing we’re not going to walk to church, as you wanted to do,” she said. “Do keep still now, Jeannette. You’d be sorry enough if this lace got torn, you know.”

She was right. My wedding-veil was made of old Alençon lace that had been our mother’s.

“I shouldn’t like it to be a thing of shreds and patches certainly,” I conceded, and keeping my head stiller than a wooden block, “when I remember that it has to perform the same part again for you (oh! don’t look like that. I can see you in the glass, recollect), the same part for you one of these fine days.”

No answer. She only turns away, and,

taking my wreath of real jasmine and orange-blossoms, touches one or two refractory little buds into their places.

"Kneel down, Netta," she says, lifting my bridal crown aloft.

"For your blessing?" I ask, doing as I am bidden.

"You must wait a bit for that," smiles she.

"How long?" I ask, with a sudden jerking upward of my head.

"Netta! Netta!" she cries, despairingly.
"Till you have deserved it by keeping quiet! How am I to finish you? Do you want to look like Madge Wildfire?"

"She was mad?" I ask myself, speculatively.

"Crossed in love. Yes," murmurs Lina.

"Synonymous terms. Shouldn't you think so?"

"I—I—don't——"

"No, of course you don't know. We

don't know anything about that sort of thing. Do we. 'Our withers are unwrung.' Eh? Because that—that little mistake of yours about—Never mind, Lina. I always count that for nothing, you know? You're running that pin yards into my head, my dear. That doesn't count, and when your turn comes——"

"What for?"

"You coquette! When your wedding-day comes——"

"I shall never have one."

"No, of course not."

"Jeannette, I'm serious. I mean it. Indeed I—Don't make a joke of it, dear—I—you see—somehow I suppose I am such a cold-hearted person, and I—I——"

For one instant her two hands dropped nervelessly on my shoulders, and the brave, sweet pale face blanched and quivered in mortal anguish.

"I don't think," she went on, recovering herself, and settling the lace about me, "I shall ever marry."

"I don't think living man deserves you," I said, clasping my arms about her, "save one, and he—he—— Now for your blessing, dear. You promised it, you know. They must see you give it me for them—our mother and father, Lina. Oh, my sister, mother, father, brother, everything and all to me. Kiss me and forgive me, darling."

"Forgive? Forgive what? It is I who——"

"Hush! hush! Kiss me, Isoline, and bid God bless me the way I am going. For his sake."

"For his sake," she murmured, clinging fast about me, to the serious jeopardizing of my bridal finery, and kissing one long soft loving kiss on my face.

I am not poor. Circumstances allow me money enough to indulge my liking for any special little treasure of art that wins me, but I would not give the memory of that kiss for all the gems of the Vatican, or the diamonds of a queen's crown.

And so together, bride and bridesmaid, we rose up, the woman who should have been, and the woman who was to be, Morton Havering's wife, and went downstairs.

At the door of her room we encounter Althea, blooming and fresh as any June rose, for all her three-score winters and her weary two nights' vigil.

"She is quieter now, poor thing," she answers, in reply to my inquiries after her patient, "but she talked fearful rubbish all night, and does not recognise anybody. Ursula was brought to see her late last evening; but she did not know her, and the sight of her only seemed to make her worse.

James thinks she never will get her reason back. I put off leaving her till the last moment, and—have I kept you waiting? I hope not.”

“If you had, the result would reward us. You always do look nice, Althea; but in silver grey silk——”

“It does match my hair, doesn’t it,” said Miss Cleveland, with a little sigh and a complacent smile.

“And a point-lace mob-cap you are absolutely bewitching!”

“And what adjective can I apply to you, Jeannette?” she replied, waving away my notes of admiration. “You leave me no choice but to call you perfection itself, if you had just one suspicion of colour.”

“I should have to borrow my becoming blushes of you.”

“And you, Isoline, dear child,” she said, the blushes deepening, “that is a sweetly

pretty dress ; but if I am to be critical, and you won't be offended, I do still think you should have chosen pink or blue, or something, if only for contrast's sake. You look like two white roses on one stalk now. Mr. Glastonbury—poor fellow,”—and Althea paid him the tribute of a long sigh—“ will be taking you for the bride. But never mind, as long as Morton—Ahem—hem ! Hadn't we better be starting ?”

CHAPTER XV.

“FORSAKING ALL OTHER.”

BEYOND some vague impression that everybody seemed leagued together in amiable conspiracy, to cheat me into the delusion that the atmosphere was all that could be desired, instead of the leaden-hued steaming misery of a morning that it actually was, I could tell little of what went on around me during that short journey to the church ; but I console myself with the reflection that brides are not called upon to be circumstantial. Yet I do remember, and it is a remembrance that can never fail, how

Havering had striven to put on a smiling face against such fearful odds; and that, if the effort only resulted in making everything look more deplorable, that was nobody's fault. I can see now the melancholy drenched garlands woven about the old lychgate, and the pink and blue calico banners hanging saturated and lifeless, in spite of the poor school children's best struggles to persuade them to float aloft, above the sea of umbrellas surging in the churchyard. A sorry sight—a ludicrous one, perhaps, this concurrence of sentiment and of ugly reality to a stranger, if any such had the misfortune to be there. But my soul yearned gratefully to those kind hearts in whose midst my life had been passed, and of whose joys and sorrows I knew something; and I could have gathered up every poor little flower starrng the crimson carpet spread to the porch, and stored them with my holiest

relics. I had imagined that perhaps, with the catastrophe to Lady Havering for the all absorbing village topic, my marriage would have been a very secondary consideration in Havering ; but I forgot the place Sir Morton had already won in their esteem ; and that if not for my sake, then certainly for his, some honour would have been done to his marriage-day, even supposing that their regrets for Lady Havering's mischance had been more than the decorous skin-deep thing it was. But half a fortune spent on printed reminders of retributive justice had not made up to her for that sympathy she had never spared them, even if she had had it to give ; and how could these people repay with the interest which some rich stewards earn of their humbler neighbours in their trial time ?

To see those faces beaming and smiling in spite of the steady drip, drip upon

best shawls and bonnets, one would not have dreamed that the great lady lay stretched upon the pallet bed of that darkened cottage-room. When the even-handed grace of charity rules supreme, no doubt we shall come to love our enemies perfectly, and, more inconceivable still, the profoundly indifferent, unsympathetic folks; but in the meantime, at least in Havering, the letter of the golden law still sufficed, and they were doing unto Lady Havering as she had done by them. She had made her bed, and now she was lying on it.

Neither to look at Ursula Havering's face, kindling with a smile of pleasure and of absolute intelligence, could one have conceived that blood of her blood lay hardly dry upon those old grey convent stones. But then Ursula was not, as people said, "like other folk," and I was not, I expect, the only one there who spared her the

benefit of absolution for her sin against the proprieties.

My charity was, however, taxed too far when that arch professoress of them, Abigail Sharples, craned her neck across my way, and with a fawning grin upon her lean lips, and an officious zeal that could not wait with the rest until the ceremony had been gone through, began to wish me happiness.

Happiness! I started shudderingly back. Her hypocritical benison smote on my ears like a curse! I had rather some baleful snake had crossed my path than that woman. I looked at her; I could have flung such words at her, as would have brought dismay into even her mean soul. I could have striven to shame her, by asking what she did in such a place, when the mistress, who had petted and fostered her wretched being for years, lay in torment? but *le roi est mort—vive le roi!* I comprehended very

well now, the twists and turns of Mrs. Sharples' mind ; and I cared to exchange no word with her, and, perhaps because my eyes spoke one tithe of what I felt, the grin died into a convulsive writhe, as she quailed and cowered away into the crowd, out of my sight—for ever.

With her characteristic persistence, she had dogged my steps to the last. It would doubtless have been a source of satisfaction to her, had she known how the apparition of her disconcerted me, and chilled my heart to such faintness, for all I passed on, carrying my head so high—too high, perhaps, for perfect acting in the little pageant, and my limbs tottered and trembled so that Sir James laid his hand smilingly on mine which rested in his arm, and whispered, "Courage!"

Heaven bless him for his kind word, that was eloquent to me of some meaning that

he could not dream of, since, as yet, I only vaguely felt it. Courage! Well, did some others of the little party, gathered there under the fair old frescoed walls, need it as I did? Were their hearts, beating now to bursting, now seeming to lie like some dead weight as mine was when, at last, I stood face to face with my betrothed husband? Was ever little marriage drama played by such ghastly chief players as these who surrounded me? Ay, perhaps, when that phantom Knight of Bürger's wild legend wedded the blasphemous Leonor. Then, perhaps, their corpse-priest looked like this living, breathing man, standing within the altar rails at the elbow of the beaming, bespectacled vicar.

White as his surplice the younger clergyman stood, with eyes neither upturned nor downcast, but steadfastly fixed before him, as the gaze of a martyr who dares to confront the

instruments of his torture. Then, it may be the bride's handmaidens looked as this one of mine did, when she bent forward to receive my bouquet into the hands trembling so terribly that they let the flowers slip, and they fell, rolling, in their stiff formal lace paper, to my feet.

With a flush of painful confusion on her dead-white cheeks, Isoline stooped to recover them, but half blinded perhaps with the tears that the low sweet organ music had conjured to her eyes, she forgot to step back, and staggered to her full height again, a little in advance of me, so that, as Althea had laughingly said, one might for the moment have asked which was the bride? It was but for the space of a lightning flash that she stood so, supplanting me by Morton's side, but the little accidental movement thrilled through me like an electric shock, which vibrated still, when she, cover-

ed with confusion, beat a precipitous retreat to her proper place. Her proper place ! Heaven help her and me !

And that spectre bridegroom, who took the passionate wilful woman at her word, he might have looked as Morton did, with no sign upon his beautiful fixed face to tell of what was passing within. There was no light and shade there of pleasure or of pain, only the calm impenetrability of one who has yielded himself to destiny. And yet I fancied that, as his eyes met mine for one fleeting instant, they shone with a faint ray of that old gentle chivalrous light which first kindled my soul's homage for him. I like to think it was there then, breathing an earnest of the future he imagined for himself and for me. The beautiful garb which should always hide from me the ever fretting girdings of regretful memory. Oh ! I like now to think that it was there, as I was sure of

it then ; because its pure romance warmed my own selfish heart to fling further aside its ugly wrappings.

Courage ! and the feeble flame intensifies. I feel I could do great things for his sake, as with steadfast gaze, most unbecoming to a person under my conditions, I stand considering him to the music of the vicar's rich pleasant voice, while, book in hand, he reads out the preliminary charge. It might have been a Chaldaic chant for all I gathered any meaning from it. Only when Swithin Glastonbury steps forward, and stands in the pale golden shaft of sunlight suddenly streaming down through the painted east window, my absorbed senses catch the significance of the shorter exordium that bids both man and woman pause even upon the very brink, for the sake of that time "when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known."

Will he quail at that ?

No, or at least, I cannot tell ; for a mist is gathering before my eyes, perhaps it is the dazzling glamour of the fast increasing light which has pierced the dense cloud rack, and all the actual—if that which we can touch be the only real—fades before my dimming eyes, and, as they say drowning men see in one brief second's space all the phantasmagoria of a long life's events, I see, as in some vivid dream, scene after scene of the days of the year that is gone, till all fades into the moonlit radiance of the haunted wood, and while, for all the articulated words of the solemn charge reach my ear like the far off hushing of summer waves upon a shingly shore, their awful meaning thunders in my ears like a tempest, through whose raging I catch those passionate farewell murmurings once again ; and I turn from their maddening sound with a

wild, uncontrollable gesture of despair, to the circle of faces around me, whose reverent composure is just a shade disturbed by the glances of wondering inquiry fixed on me. No one? Is there not one here who will save me from myself? Not one who dares to dispute my treasure with me? No fiend of darkness. No angel of light. No friend—no foe?—Not one! Here I stand, and already gleaming in his hand, I see the little golden ring that shall bind me to him, faster than iron chains bind criminals to their death.

Death? Oh, Life! Love! was ever voice so passing sweet as yours, as you vow to have me for your wedded wife, “forsaking all other,” and—now?—now?—

No, you do not flinch at that! Unfaltering and clear comes your responsive, “I will.”

And Swithin Glastonbury, rapidly passing the loose sleeve of his surplice across his

face, turns to me, and there is a light rustle and stir in the crowded church as the good people settle themselves, and hold their breath to catch my low, modestly-murmured assent to the words he is uttering—every one more precious than priceless pearls.

Syllable by syllable, I weigh their value as they fall, and I know they cannot be mine. At last I know it! Honestly they never can be mine, and I refuse all the joy they could bring me—and say: “I will—NOT!”

“I will—NOT!” That is what they hear as, clasping my hands about my brain, to steady its wild whirl, my fingers tangle in my wreath, the badge and crown of my arrogant usurpation. Tearing it off, I fling it down upon the worn gravestones at the altar’s foot. If their weight had been crushing me, and suddenly lifted, the sense of relief could not be greater than came to me then; and with deep gasping breaths,

and a laugh that echoes harshly along the old walls, I turn and face the sea of gaping, wonder-stricken faces.

“I will not—be married to this man! I refuse. Do you hear me all? I refuse him—here in the sight of Heaven and you—because—I have no right to be his wife. There is a woman who has; for the sake—of the love they bear—to each other, but treachery and deceit parted them, and I—I—understood this for the first time yesterday, and I—could not—I—I——”

“Netta! Netta!” and I feel Isoline’s trembling fingers clutching convulsively at my sleeve. “Hush! You are mad!”

“Leave me!” I cry, tearing myself with such violence from her grasp that I send her staggering backward. “No, I am not mad. I have been mad, I think, but my senses have all come back to me—now. Only now. So late, you say? Well—not too

.

late. No, not too late; and here I claim to renounce my right—such as it was—do you hear?—such as it was, to be his wife, and——”

“But——” interposes a chorus of voices from the circle hemming me in, as already my feet are on the edge of the chancel footpace. “But——”

“Do you dare to keep me here against my will?” I demand, turning on them with tigerish fury. “Do you doubt me—Doubt me still? Look there then!”

And their eyes follow mine to where, unconscious of all besides, Morton Havering, infinite absorbing love and tenderness in his eyes, stands clasping to his breast the unconscious figure of Isoline, pale indeed unto death, but with the old light, that faded somewhere about a year ago, now illuminating, like some pure lamp’s flame through whitest alabaster, the white still face.

"No. You do not!" I whirl on. "You doubt me no longer! I see it in your faces. You know it all now, as I have come to know it; and you will let me go. Can you not let me go?" I demand, with surprised entreaty, for still the circle hems me in.

"This—this," falters out Sir James, "is some mistake."

"Ay, yes, Sir James; it has been a hideous one, but I—you see, I have cleared it up now," I say, with a smile which appears only to have the effect of increasing his consternation, "and I—had better go at once. Will you not let me go?" and gently I thrust him aside. "Oh! this is too much!" I cry, for still they bar my way, and the aisles are crowding densely. "You cannot be so cruel! Let me go, I say!" and I fling my arms upward and round me in wild despair. "Do you want to madden me really? Have you no pity? Will no

one——Mr. Glastonbury! can you stand there and see me tortured like this? Tell them I am not mad—that I have only striven to—do what—what is right! Tell them that.”

“Ay, indeed she has. Let her go in peace.”

And at his bidding, as it rang out clear and authoritatively through the church, the crowd fell apart, making a passage for me to the porch, and I passed through, pausing for an instant on the threshold to drag my hand before my eyes and try to think again. I looked up, away from the astonished faces, and low, perplexed murmurings that greeted me (for already the sounds within had warned the patient outsiders that something had gone amiss) up to the sky above. The rain had ceased, and silver clouds were swiftly chasing each other upon the pale, sunlit blue; but it was cold, very, very cold

with autumn's breath; and perhaps I shivered, for I felt some pitying hand throw a large warm rain-cloak about my shoulders, and gratefully gathering my trailing satin under its dark folds, and pulling its hood close up about my head, I hurried on—on. Would those people come after me?—hunt me and my misery to death, to feed their own curiosity? Well, had they done it, would it not have been almost pardonable? They must indeed have thought I was mad; but not one stirred; and long afterwards I came to know that Swithin Glastonbury had earned me that merciful forbearance of theirs—"Let her go in peace," and his command had spread like wildfire from mouth to mouth.

On—on, avoiding the village, through byways and field-paths, where only the grazing cows just lifted their calm eyes to consider me as I fled past; on—stum-

bling, lame, and half blindly, through the sodden and muddy grass, until I had gained the solitary open heath about half way to St. Grimwold's, and there I paused for breath.

Hark! Hush! Footsteps! And they are dogging me after all! My ears told me true then, and it was not my excited fancy that taught me to hear a voice calling to me again and again as I fled. Close upon me now. Only the field hedge between, whose feathery trailing garlands of wild clematis scatter a sparkling shower of raindrops as, quivering and creaking for an instant, it yields to some desperate struggling force. "It's me!—only me!"

"Ursula!" I cry in dismay, staring at the wild, dishevelled elf-locks, and scratched and bleeding hands which she holds stretched out entreatingly towards me.

"Ay, yes!" she gasps out. "Why did

you run so fast? I thought I never should come up with you."

"And why—what do you want?" I demand, sharply.

"Only to come with you."

"Come with me!—Where?" I ask her, with a mocking laugh.

"Where you are going," she answers, with blunt composure.

"Child!" I reply, "I do not know where I am going. Go back! Do you hear me? Go back at once."

"No, no!" she says, shudderingly looking behind her. "I won't—if I do—if you send me away, mind, I'm going to drown myself, that's——"

"For shame!"

"I don't care. What's the use of being alive, if nobody cares for you?"

"My poor child!"

"Do you say that?" she cries, with glad

eagerness, springing to my side, and throwing her arms about me. "I thought you would. You always were good to me."

"I don't know what I've ever——"

"Oh, yes, yes. You've spoken kind words to me, and—I love you, Jeannette, and now you are all alone, and——"

"Go back, I tell you. I am worse than all alone."

"But you wouldn't be with me," she contends, with a smile of triumph.

If she had known, poor wretch, how I loathed the sight of her then, when my one hope seemed to lie in utter isolation at least from all association of the old home! How I longed to shake her off, and rush onwards! I could have done it; her heavy, but weak frame was spent and breathless, and a supernatural strength seemed to be with me. But there was a fixed dogged purpose in her face that impelled me to pause.

"You must take me with you," she went on, gravely. "You'll want me. See if you won't. I mean to be your servant, and I'll never be in your way. Whenever you don't want me, you know, I can go for a walk or something. Take me with you, Jeannette."

"Where?"

"How should I know? To the world's end, perhaps. What does it signify? You must be going somewhere, or you wouldn't have run so fast."

A faint smile must have quivered on my lips, for her face grew brighter and brighter, and she said,

"That means yes."

"And your mother?"

"Lady Havering? Why, she's mad, they say," quickly interrupted the girl.

"And supposing she should recover, and find you gone?"

"It would be better," she said, cowering closer to me, and looking fearfully round, like some hunted animal. "It would be better than for her to find me here. She'd——"

"Nonsense! nonsense!" I said, sternly, and trying to disengage myself from her clutching fingers. "It is impossible, I tell you. You cannot come with me. I have no home."

"And I haven't either; you know I haven't. But I understand how it is, and—good-bye, Jeannette. I am half a fool, I know. I've heard that dreadful woman say so heaps of times; but I'm not so stupid as not to know where the deepest place in the moat lies, and I'm going there."

"What for?" I asked, with a feigned laugh.

"Why—to drown myself."

"Fiddle-de-dee!"

"Ah! you think I'm afraid, but I'm not, so I tell you."

"I don't care a bit for your threats," I said, stealing an uneasy glance at the odd, stolid determination in her face.

"No," she said, mournfully, "I see you don't. I thought perhaps you might a little, but you'll only be saying, 'And a good job too,' as the others will do, when they've fished me out."

"Ursula," I said, solemnly, "if you did any such awfully wicked thing, you'd never go to heaven, mind."

"Oh, yes, I shall," she said. "It'll be you the angels won't let in. 'Send her away!' they'll say. 'That's the cruel thing who might have saved her with just a word,'—only just one little word, Jeannette dear—'and wouldn't.' They'll send you away, as you're doing me now."

"You want to threaten me?"

“No, I don’t; I only want to come with you, Jeannette,” and she fell on her knees, sobbing bitterly. “It’s only one little—little word—only——”

“Come, then.”

CHAPTER XVI.

HAVERING GOSSIP.

HAVERING is only a memory to me now; but one perhaps far more vivid than many a reality of the years that have passed since Ursula and I took our flight together.

We were let go our ways, after a few feeble efforts had been made to induce us to come back. I was a free agent, and, as for Ursula, it was probable enough, as she had guessed, that I was welcome to the bargain of herself which she had thrust upon me.

I have not regretted it. There are bur-

dens we would rather groan under than part with. And, moreover, she is no longer by any means the wearisome one she was. I have been rewarded for the efforts to nourish the dull, wavering flame of her intellect, and when I look at her now, content and interested over a piece of needle-work or a story-book, I find it difficult to think of her as the mooning loiterer of old days. Perhaps as much for my own sake as hers, I have done what I have ; for she means never to leave me, she says. Her escapade was never known by Lady Haver-
ing ; who, after lingering in lethargic unconsciousness for some weeks, succumbed at last to her injuries, and she lies now in the great family vault at Havering, where a costly mural tablet, hewn and inscribed in accordance with her own minute directions for the same, found after her death, records her condition and virtues ; whereto, the

present Lady Havering tells me, her husband has dared to add a *Requiescat in Pace*.

Though I have a satisfaction in thinking my endeavours have done much towards brightening Ursula's wits, I believe more has been achieved by the conviction that she has come to be of some use in the world. The novel sensation had an effect upon her, as salutary as the old consciousness of being worse than useless was corrupting.

Of some use, did I say? That is but yielding her only a tithe of her dues, poor child! When I recall her dog-like fidelity, her patience with my heart-sick, and often, I think, brain-sick whims and humours, I know all I can ever do for her will never repay her.

Had I been left alone with my thoughts, as I prayed again and again to be then, I

must have sunk in the sea of despair and desolation.

"You'll want me," she said that day; and I have wanted her, and I want her still; to draw me out of myself.

Since then we have travelled many a league together, seen strange beautiful things of whose mere existence her old monotonous life had not so much as dreamed, and which have filled her with wondering, vague delight; and her great pleasure is to sally forth beside me, armed with her own sketch-book and pencil. Fearful and wonderful are the contents of that padlocked mysterious volume, which no eye but mine is ever allowed to look into.

But, take it for all in all, I do not think any place has pleased her so thoroughly as this old north German town, where we have taken up our quarters for many weeks past, with its many-storied, gabled houses, and

red-roofed churches, whose slender spires taper high up into the grey sky. Each day we talk of moving onward, and still the setting sun leaves us wandering among the turf-grown ramparts, under the tall limes that are mirrored in the river below. One quiet nook we have made our special haunt; undeterred by the sinister reputation it has acquired, if one may credit an amiable Fräulein friend of mine anxious at one and the same time to make me acquainted with her native town's attractions, and to air her knowledge of the English tongue; for "it is," she explained, "the place where always people comes to, when they likes to drown themselves."

But we go there to watch the tall-masted ships come gliding into haven from the stormy north seas, and the little steamboats scudding merrily, with their gay coloured lamps ahead, to the frequent landing stages. Sometimes, on the long summer after-

noons, we too step on board, and have ourselves carried to one or another of the quaint old villages that nestle among the sombre pine woods fringing the river banks, and there we drink our coffee and feast on crisp "kringels."

The old Frauen-Kirche walls must know us well too, for we have wheedled its ancient custodian, who always looks, in his black velvet skull-cap, and long scholar's cloak, as if he had just stepped bodily out of the group of Lutheran doctors in the old picture over the sacristy door—him we have wheedled, I say, into letting us pass to and fro, and in and out, of the silent church at our own sweet will. And midday stroke seldom sets the two goats butting at each other atop of the sun-faced chancel clock, whose saucer eyes have goggled the seconds through these three centuries past, without Ursula being there to see; while I work on at my copy

of the Hans Memling tryptich which hangs in the little side chapel, and let my thoughts wander back to old days.

—I dared not do that once, but now—if still there is untold bitterness in them—I would not give them for the sunniest retrospect mortal life ever knew ; and in this chiar-oscuro of mine, that is graven so deep into my heart, I find such fair sunlit streaks piercing mysteriously into its darkest corners.

Though fathoms of sea roll between me and Old England, I have two most regular and graphic home correspondents, who keep me coached up in every incident great and small that occurs. One is Isoline, and I wonder how she manages never to disappoint me in the matter of that letter which the postman brings to my sitting-room door every alternate Sunday at one o'clock p.m. ; for I know, though not from herself, what an important little lady in the county Sir

Morton Havering's wife has come to be. It could not be otherwise, of course. And then, too, Lina has three children now, if one reckons the seven weeks' old scrap of humanity rolled up in its yards and yards of cambric and lace, that my other correspondent has so much to tell me about; and, if hearsay be true, he is the ruling power at Havering Court just now.

This other correspondent of mine is Althea Cleveland. From the time she sent me the news my soul yearned for, that Isoline had become Morton Havering's wife, to this present moment when I break, for somewhere about the hundredth time, the neat seal of the envelope bearing the well-known, formal, clear Italian handwriting, her budget has never failed me. A very long letter to-day, but full, as she says, "of nothing particular. And James calls me an inveterate old gossip, and says I shall bore you; but he

knows nothing at all about it, and so I have just told him. He is, I am glad to say, enjoying excellent health, and desires you his best remembrance (although, as I tell him, his message just adds to this 'preposterous epistle,' as he calls it); and when are you thinking of paying the poor old country a visit? His words, my dear Jeannette, not mine, though indeed I do most heartily second them, and venture to add that I hope there is no special attraction in that old world town you have located yourselves in. Of course I can enter into your feelings about its being immensely interesting and all that, but is it not rather what the French call *triste*? (dead-alive more correctly, perhaps), and I am aware that the Germans are sometimes intellectual persons (if you remember, I warned you—or was it *Iso-line*?—of that long ago), but I must con-

fess I trust this is not really the case ; I mean, of course, that your ultimate lot will be cast, as I believe it is Charles Dibdin who says, in this 'right little, tight little island.'

"I cannot say I thought Mr. Glastonbury looking well. He has aged, to my thinking, but then so have I. I daresay five years *is* five years, or *are* five years (I never do know which is right), is it not? I told him he worked too hard, but he says work agrees with him. And then that hat, you know, Jeannette (and the last new one is bigger than ever), why, it would turn even a marble Adonis into a fright! I left them all as well as heart could wish at Havering Court yesterday, after my pleasant fortnight there. Morton looks the picture of health, with an absolute colour in his face; though he does spend more than half his

time over those Notes on Dante's Purgatorio—on second thoughts, I fancy it's Paradise now,—and when he is not at that, he's in the field behind Bogslush Lane, superintending the draining of that great swampy hole. As to Havering, it idolizes him, and well it may. Your godchild thrives bonnily. Such great dark eyes! and altogether she promises to be almost as handsome as her aunt. How amused you would be at her funny little ways! The other day, when her brother (four last Monday—ah! how tempus fugit! does it not?) called her Nettie, my lady was mighty indignant, if you please, and said: 'My name is Jeannette, like my aunt's.'

"Isoline is well, and lovelier than ever; but, my dear child, I think her cup of happiness has its dash of bitter, and will have it, till a certain person thinks proper to go

back to Havering, or within a hundred miles of it, let us say. Fires are kept constantly burning in the grates at Cliffe Cottage, for, as she says, 'You might be back at any moment,' and the rooms are dusted every morning, and the windows thrown open, and your easel, with that charming little unfinished sketch of St. Grimwold's wood, is all ready for you in its old corner. My dear child, I never did consider your sister a demonstrative person, but somehow the tears that brim up into those sweet blue eyes of hers when she sits thinking quietly, with her new little baby in her lap, and she fancies nobody is looking, tell their own little tale to me, better than a thousand words could.

"Scamp is also in excellent health ; rather less nimble in his movements than he used to be, I fancy ; but I consider that

as an improvement. I hope Miss Havering is well. Kindly present my best regards to her.

“I must not forget to tell you that Mrs. Tugnutt met Abigail Sharples the other day in St. Grimwold’s high street. She has left her situation, she told her—rather in a hurry, Dolly fancied. She has become blind of one eye. ‘Over use,’ she said, and Mr. Josiah Milligan told Dolly afterwards, that that was only true, for he had it on excellent authority, that a young gentleman from Eton, spending his vacation in the house where Sharples was lady’s-maid, and who was under some impression that she was in the habit of prying into his correspondence, filled an envelope with some explosive material, and naturally she could not dare to make any complaints. Of course I should be sorry to be uncharitable to anybody, but the circumstantial evidence does look strong.

“London is out of town. Here, there, and everywhere. James and I are going next week to the Lakes. If I were one degree less wretched a sailor than I am, or that terrible Channel were a mill-pond, I think I know where I would find my way to ; but I expect, as far as this world is concerned, ‘the continent’ will remain a terra incognita for me. And that reminds me that Mr. Glastonbury told me he was going to start next Monday, for his month’s holiday, and if ever man deserved one he does. He was observing to me that he thought Holstein and Denmark and Norway, and up that way, would be quite a pleasant variety from the beaten tracks of Switzerland and Italy, swarming so unpleasantly, as they must be, with those Cook’s tourist people, and that those quaint old north German towns must be so immensely full of interest. I was

going to say (on the spur of the moment), that I should have imagined, to a person of his ritualistic tastes, Rome and the sunny South would have proved more attractive; but on second thoughts I said I quite fell in with his view of the case. And of course if he should decide—as I am inclined to think he may—on coming northward, it would be quite natural he should spend a day or so in your old Hanse town, brimful as it is of such queer curiosities. And if you should chance to meet, as ten to one you would, in a place like that, with only half a dozen people in it (even if Lina did not give him the parcel to bring you, which I know she does mean to do, because she told me so), I do hope you will make things pleasant for him, and show him any little attention, especially if he——My dear Jeannette, James says it is four o'clock, and the mail closes at

a quarter past. So no more, excepting God bless you, and send you home again to the hearts that love you, not among the least of which is that, my dear Jeannette, of

“ Your affectionate friend,

“ ALTHEA CLEVELAND.”

THE END.

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